

BY JOSEPH E. BADGER, JR.

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## THE SPORTING DETECTIVE.



THE BEAUTIFUL LURE RAN HER HAND INTO HIS BREAST POCKET AND DREW FORTH THE BETRAYING NOTE.

THE

## Sporting Detective;

OR,

JOKEY JAP'S DOUBLE-CROSS.

A Racs-Track Revelation.

BY JOS. E. BADGER, JR.

## CHAPTER I.

THE GAMBLER'S LAST STAKE.

THOUSANDS of voices blending together as one in a low-pitched yet far reaching roar; countless eyes straining across track and field, from fashionable grand-stand, exclusive coach, drag or landau, from democratic level trodden hard and dry by innumerable feet since the opening day of the great race-meeting.

All thoughts, hopes and fears fastened upon yonder little patch of brilliant colors, partially veiled by a tiny cloud of dust just now; but through which flickered the falling flag of the starter a few seconds later.

"They're off at last!"

"It's a start!"

"Look at him, will ye? Just eating 'em up!"

That dull roar became an irregular yell, only to die out just as quickly, for now there could be no further doubt: the large field of horses had been fairly started, and a few fast-fleeting seconds of time would decide more than one moderate fortune lost or won.

With the swift tattoo of two-score plated hoofs the runners came down the stretch, the original line already broken as the hotter bloods forged to the front, and from all those eagerly watching thousands not a sound came, while the majority fairly held breath until, with kaleidoscopic flash, the racers swept under the wire with a full mile yet to cover.

Then the pent-up breath broke forth, and from scores of throats came the exultant cry:

"Dixie wins! Dixie first, and the rest nowhere!"

So it seemed, though but one-fifth of the journey was over when the wire was passed; but even so early in the race the gallant little bay mare was leading her competitors by a clear length, her monkey-like jockey grinning after the fashion which "Jockey Jap" has made famous from ocean to ocean during the past half-score years.

"The Jap forever!" roared one wild-eyed enthusiast, flinging his silk hat high into air and never giving it look or heed again as he shifted position for a better look after the racers. "He's riding it out from end to end, and—glory to the little mare!"

"If she don't crack! It's too hot to last, and—Look at The White Ghost, will ye?"

Again that characteristic roar of many lungs in unison which can only be heard upon a race-track; then the irresistible surge and crush of thousands as men fought for a clearer view of the further course.

Mayo Preston took only a passive part in that insane struggle of the many, though few of all present had so much at stake as he.

Under the shadow of the judges' stand he had held his position since before the bell rung to summon the horses from stables to track.

He paid no attention to the lusty-lunged auctioneers, merely shaking head in negation as offers to give or accept odds on this race came his way; for long hours since he had made his final plunge, and now stood to "win or go bu'st!"

It was his last stake, in more senses than one, and though his eyes shone like twin balls of fire as they took note of the beautiful bay mare leading the bunch under the wire for the first time, he dared not fight for a continuous view, but clung with a deathlike grip to the inner railing there close to the wire where he could know his fate without waiting for the judges to announce their decision from their perch above the course.

A dizzy blur came over his eyes as those wild yells and cheers rung forth in praise of Jockey Jap and his mount, the bay mare Dixie; but it was as though an icy hand had

suddenly closed upon his heart when that other name was pealed forth, for "The White Ghost" had long since been marked dangerous by the betting public, as well as the book-makers.

His heart seemed to cease its throbings, and Mayo Preston looked fairly corpse-like as he drooped over the railing just then.

Eyesight failed him for the moment, yet he needed it not. By the broken sentences, the excited cries, now exultant, now despondent, he could tell just how the race was fluctuating, for now the name of the little bay mare, who had for a year past been hailed as "Queen of the Track," was but one of half a dozen others.

Like one almost in a dream, Mayo Preston felt a hand in his pocket, then withdrawn suddenly as there came another sharp but lesser surge in that vicinity.

He turned his head, taking imperfect note of a scramble or an incipient fight only a few feet distant; but then his gaze turned once more upon the level stretch to catch the first glimpse of the racers as they rounded the last turn and entered upon the final fight for victory, which meant so much more than winning the rich purse "hung up" by the Association.

As through a mist Preston caught sight of the now close-bunched leaders, and then closed his eyes with a painful gasp, for—was it anything more than imagination?

Surely he saw the gaudy colors of the Carpenter Stable in the lead of all? Surely Dixie was—

"Dixie! Dixie wins!"

"Now she is Queen of the Turf!"

"Jockey Jap!"

Then those initial cries blended into one mighty roar as the half-score racers fairly swung into the home-stretch, the majority of them so nearly bunched as to insure that grandest sight of all: a "whipping finish."

For the first time since the start, Mayo Preston gave an audible sound—one more nearly akin to a prayer than had crossed his lips for many a long month, too!

For he saw those colors in the lead, now, the gallant little mare closely hugging the rail, and—Jockey Jap in the pigskin!

Closer, nearer, those hoofs rattling against the earth like heavy hail on a hollow roof! Nearing the wire, with every spur save two viciously raking ribs, with each right arm save one rising and falling in strokes that left sore weals behind them!

Nearer yet, with Jockey Jap crouching low over Dixie's withers, chin on shoulder as he grins back at his closest competitors, his whip-hand lifted but as yet without striping that bright bay coat!

Surely 'twas all over but shouting!

And yet—

Nearer still! Only yards remain to be covered, and Dixie more than half a length in the lead, with Jockey Jap grinning in the wide-spread nostrils of The White Ghost!

"A Jockey Jap finish!" shrilly cried one of those intensely-excited witnesses, just then. "The little demon is—Fury!"

For, just then, when hardly a dozen of her own brief lengths from the wire, Dixie felt the whalebone for the first time, and at the same instant swerved sharply to the right, coming into partial collision with The White Ghost, and throwing him hopelessly out of his stride!

Only for an instant; then the little mare steadied herself and shot under the wire with a full length to the good.

But, the harm was already done, as that awful uproar too plainly indicated. Oaths and curses, howls and screams of wildest exultation; the first from those who had backed the bay mare, the others from The White Ghost adherents, who saw certain defeat changed into almost certain victory, all in the twinkling of an eye!

Mayo Preston saw it all, and though never a sound came through his blanched lips, while he held his position there in the shadow of the judges' stand, he knew that the worst had come to pass; that he had placed his last stake, only to see it lost through a fluke!

He stood still through all that fierce excitement, taking no part in that vicious outcry, though few of all the thousand then present had greater cause for cursing that ill timed swerving on the part of the little mare who usually ran so true.

And it was like one in a waking dream

that Mayo Preston listened to the decision given by the judges, after due consultation.

The exact words escaped his dazed wits, but the purport was clear enough: Dixie was put back to tenth place through interference, while White Ghost was given the race and the purse!

Although no different decision could have been given, even if hoped for, these words were greeted with a savage storm of curses and yells, through which rung still more ominous sounds; threats against Jockey Jap for selling a race already won!

This seemed to rouse the gambler to something like his wonted nature, and Mayo Preston left the position he had held so long and so vainly, his brown eyes glowing redly, twin spots of hectic color coming into his unnaturally pale cheeks as he pressed forward, calling aloud:

"Curse the master, not the tool! Jockey Jap rides to orders, and—ask Clifford Carpenter which horse he was backing!"

That deep-toned voice seemed to cast a spell over all that turbulent crowd, and for a few seconds silence reigned. But before Mayo Preston could follow up this blow, a hand closed upon his shoulder, and a voice made itself heard:

"Ketched ye at last, boss! They was sech a powerful jam back yender that I jest couldn't—Yourn, hain't it, sir?"

A burly figure, a coarse-featured face on which now rested a grin, confronted the gambler as he turned swiftly at that touch.

"I don't—what's the matter with you?"

"Tain't so much my matter as yours, boss," and a none too clean hand held forth a silver-clasped pocketbook, with metal monogram showing uppermost. "A crook pinch-ed it back yender, jest as the hosses come down the home-stretch, an' so—"

"My book, surely!" exclaimed Preston, in vague surprise as his hand went back to hip-pocket where now only vacancy existed.

"Waal, I reckon!" with his grin broadening, "I jumped the crook an' got back the weasel-skin, ye see, but him—waal, all was in sech a powerful jam jest then that he done skipped out, boss!"

With something of that dull, dazed sensation returning, Mayo Preston heard so much of the explanation, then muttered his thanks as he took back the pocketbook, giving in exchange one of the few golden coins with which his pocket was meagerly lined.

Another surge of the excited crowd served to separate the two men, and, forgetting the incident for the moment, the ruined gambler moved dazedly away, neither knowing nor caring whither his steps trended.

Friends and acquaintances spoke to him in passing, and he made answer as often, after some sort, although an instant later he could not have recalled either face or speech.

Had the blow been less heavy, Mayo Preston surely would not have suffered so long in silence, and that fierce uproar might easily have mounted to another race-course tragedy; but now he seemed like one stunned, only conscious of a dumb beast-like longing to creep off into obscurity, there to lick his wounds and die in silence!

It was this instinct which finally led him clear of the quieting mob, and when once away from the quarter-stretch with its swelling jam of swaying humanity, the ruined gambler first took thought for outward appearances, stung from his brief stupor by a clear, ringing laugh.

It seemed as though that mirth was directed at himself, just then, and, stopping short, he brushed a trembling hand across his eyes.

There, only a few yards away, stood an open landau, in which half reclined a couple of richly clad women, smiling brightly as they listened to the words and the laugh of a tall, athletic gentleman who stood close to the carriage door.

A hot flush leaped into the gambler's face at the sight, and then he seemed to realize for the first time how terribly he had been stricken by that false move on the part of Jockey Jap and "Queen Dixie."

For this laughing man was none other than the bay mare's owner, known throughout the sporting world as Cliff Carpenter, "The Plunger!"

In that moment Mayo Preston lost all of that numbing stupor, and, striding for-

ward, brushing to right and to left the few men who stood between himself and the man whom he now hated so savagely, he let fall a heavy hand upon Carpenter's shoulder, rudely jerking him around so that they stood face to face, at the same time fiercely crying out:

"You infernal cheat! Take that from me, Cliff Carpenter!"

At the same instant his tightly clinched fist was dashed into that still smiling face with all the power he could summon!

## CHAPTER II.

### A BLOW BELOW THE BELT.

THAT stroke would have "knocked out" nine men out of every ten, and it sent the athletic "Plunger" reeling back after a dizzy fashion, even though he kept his feet.

From the landau came a shrill, feminine scream, and one of the women would have sprung from cushioned seat to earth only for the swiftly-restraining arms of her less agitated companion.

"Don't—for my sake, Mayo!" the fair creature cried in her surprised terror. "I never meant—"

If the gambler heard, he did not heed. He recoiled a bit through the force of his own blow, but swiftly rallied, clearly intending to follow up his fierce assault without giving the Plunger time to pull himself together.

"Maybe you can steal some men's money, you grinning fraud, but you can't pick my pocket without— Hands off, curse you!"

"Steady, sir!" cried a deep, commanding tone as those hands tightened their grip for the instant.

Mayo Preston twisted far enough around to glimpse that face, then wrenched himself free while fiercely crying:

"It's not your say, Miles Honeyman! Let me get at the devil for—"

"Give the fool his head, Miles!" sternly cut in the assaulted Plunger, rallying with marvelous quickness from that unexpected shock. "I'll rub him down, if I have to do it with a club!"

"You've skinned me already, you thief!" viciously raged Preston as he faced the angry horseman. "You sold this race, and now I'll take my pay out of your mangy hide!"

But, once again sturdy Miles Honeyman swung in between the two men, whose coming together just then might easily mean death to one or to both, and once again his muscular hands forced Mayo Preston away from his enemy.

"Steady, lad!" his deep-toned voice rumbled. "This isn't time nor place for such a settlement, and so— Don't make me carry you like I might a squalling kid, Preston!"

"He's an infernal cheat! He bet against his own horse, and sold out to the—"

"Quiet the fool, Honeyman!" sternly commanded the Plunger, sweeping aside several men who had rushed forward in their eagerness to see and hear all. "If he's neither drunk nor crazy, then he's surely—"

"Been robbed by a cursed thief, and that's Cliff Carpenter!"

With one mighty bound, Carpenter reached the side of the enraged gambler, his usually florid face showing almost ghastly pale as he spoke in clear, cold accents:

"This is not the time nor the place for such talk, Mr. Preston. You are drunk—too drunk to fully realize what a fool you are making of yourself, just now. But, I'll see you later for full settlement, do you understand?"

Powerless for words in the strong grasp of Miles Honeyman, sometimes called "The Sporting Detective," Mayo Preston gave a sneering laugh, then cried out tauntingly:

"It's all or nothing, is it, you thief? You've stripped my hide with your crooked racing, and now you want my tallow?"

"Cork it up, man, dear!" sternly muttered Honeyman, as he hurried the gambler off, giving a nod of authority which served to open a passage through the crowd which morbid curiosity had drawn that way for the moment.

At the same time other friends gathered about Clifford Carpenter, and so what might easily have proved a tragedy there, was averted: for how long a time?

The excitement caused by the unexpected loss of an important race already fairly won, was so great that very few among all those

thousands present had time or inclination for less than a tragedy on the outside, and with comparative little difficulty Miles Honeyman succeeded in winning clear of the mass with his charge.

Then he began in more soothing tones, though Preston paid precious little heed for the first few minutes, relapsing into something like the stupor which had first fallen upon him as he saw his dawning hopes so cruelly blasted by that strange bit of riding on Jockey Jap's part.

"You want to get a brace on, man, dear," finally said Honeyman as they moved slowly toward one of the wide gates. "What if you did back the mare to win? Surely she's pulled off more than one fat lump for your table in her time? And this flea-bite won't hurt you long; eh, lad?"

Mayo Preston gave a start at this, flinging back his damp hair and laughing harshly for a moment. Then he quoted:

"'No, 'tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door; but 'tis enough, 'twill serve!'"

Despite his laughter, there was a touch of deep and dark despair in both tone and manner which warned the Sporting Detective this was no ordinary blow, and for a brief space even his ready tongue was at a loss what to offer.

Then he ventured a few words of sympathy for such loss as Preston might have sustained through that unfortunate *contretemps*, adding:

"If it wasn't an accident, such as will happen just when it costs the most, blame a crooked jockey, not an honest owner, lad."

"Meaning Cliff Carpenter, of course?" sneeringly asked the gambler, rousing like steed under spur at that allusion.

"That's just what I do mean, Preston," gravely assured the detective. "I'm not saying that I've known Carpenter longer than you have, but I do say this much: I know him better than you do, if you can honestly deem him capable of throwing a race."

"What else can you call it, then?"

"What I did term it—an unfortunate accident."

"An accident which fills the Plunger's pockets while emptying ours, then!"

"You wrong yourself even worse than you do Clifford Carpenter by bringing such baseless charges, Preston," sternly reproved the detective, swinging around in front of the sorely-stricken gambler, hand resting on shoulder once more. "If there was anything crooked—"

"If!" echoed the gambler, with a short, bitter laugh.

"Then blame a crooked jockey, not his master for the day," repeated Honeyman. "Jasper Deagle isn't above selling his own mother if he was offered his full price, but, Cliff Carpenter—never!"

"Did Dixie ever swerve before under the whalebone?"

"Maybe not, but there must always be a first time. And—I say, Preston?"

"Well, say it, then!"

"If there is aught crooked in this race, you want to look further on than Carpenter. You surely ought to know—don't fly off the handle too sudden, lad! But you surely ought to know a more likely quarter, and so I say as a true friend: look out for Ulrich Farquhar and Eloise Houghton, Mayo!"

That warning seemed well-founded, but proved of slight avail, since the gambler flushed crimson at those names, jerking free from that restraining hand, huskily and fiercely muttering:

"I reckon you mean well, Honeyman, but if you dare to utter so much as one word against her to me or in my hearing, I'll serve you worse than I did Cliff Carpenter—curse him for a barefaced swindler and fraud!"

Fiercely striking down the friendly hand which would have checked him, Mayo Preston turned sharply away, leaving that spot with long and hasty strides.

The Sporting Detective gazed after his figure for a brief space, then shrugged his broad shoulders, muttering a half-pitying, half-contemptuous sentence as he himself turned away to reach the race-course once more.

Although there was still an unusual amount of noise in that direction, which might possibly

amount to something serious if the excited crowd should gain a determined head and leader, Mayo Preston gave neither glance nor thought further that way.

He had plunged to his utmost limit on Dixie, and now that his last stake was forfeited by the recorded decision of the judges, he had nothing further to do with that oft-trodden track.

Though still unusually pale, his face was sternly composed, now, and there was little in his manner to attract more than ordinary attention as he passed on to where he had left his favorite saddle-horse in charge during the race.

At a word from his lips the gray gelding was quickly equipped for the road, and tossing the grinning hostler one of his very few remaining coin, the gambler mounted and rode quietly out from the well-kept grounds, even smiling grimly to himself as he recalled how differently he had expected that departure to be taken.

"And I reckon it's for the last time, too!" he mused, looking back at that familiar entrance as the roadster trotted briskly onward. "Well, I've left my mark, anyway! And—now to cash my tickets!"

His laughter changed sharply as he uttered those final words, and once more his eyes took on a reddish luster as he drew forth the silver-clasped book from his hip-pocket.

For the moment he had forgotten all about the loss and the strange restoration, and his usually firm fingers trembled a bit as they opened the book, taking therefrom a quantity of pool tickets, each one headed with the name of Cliff Carpenter's bay mare, Dixie!

A touch of sadness came into that frowning visage as his eyes ran quickly over the large figures there set down. Though these tickets represented but a small portion of his investments on Dixie, many a man would have deemed the sum total a modest fortune.

"Charge them to—not profit and loss, but to Clifford Carpenter! He'll pay—he shall pay, or I'll take his black heart as security!"

With a few vicious wrenches of his strong fingers and thumbs, Mayo Preston tore the bright-hued cards into scores of pieces, then flinging aloft the ragged bits to laugh fiercely as the parti-colored rain came fluttering about his head and shoulders.

From the now distant race-course came the sound of high voices and the ruined gambler looked back, grimly smiling ere he muttered:

"Howl, ye poor fools! Howl now, but blindly let them pluck ye over and over again, even as I have done! Ha! if they only knew how precious hard I'm hit this time! Wouldn't they grin and mop and mow?"

"If they only knew why I plunged so recklessly! Why, what else had I left? 'Twas my only chance to keep lips above water long enough to win Eloise for—what? I don't remember—what's this, anyway?"

For his eyes had caught sight of a folded note lying snugly in one of the compartments of his pocket-book, which he almost knew had never been placed there by his fingers. Unless—was his brain failing him, as well?

Mayo Preston extracted that bit of paper, sniffing slightly as he detected an odor coming from those opening folds. Who was it so fond of White Rose? Who could—what?

He caught his breath sharply, for there, before his startled eyes, was the name of the one woman on earth whom he loved—the name of the woman whom he had so fiercely warned Miles Honeyman against maligning.

He brushed a hand across his eyes, then forced himself to slowly decipher the words there set down in a stiff, plainly-disguised hand.

"Will your eyes never open to the truth, poor, silly moth? Will you ever remain blind to what all others can see without trying, Mayo Preston? Will you forever persist in calling Eloise Houghton a saint, when all the world else knows her for worse than sinner?"

"Do you doubt the truth of this friendly warning, then?"

"If so, ask Eloise Houghton why she is never at home to you on Tuesday and Friday evenings? Ask her why she is so fond of riding in Forest Park? Ask her whom she

meets twice each week under the Druid's Oak?

"Or, dare you watch for that meeting of lovers, Mayo Preston? If so, bear in mind both place and date, and may common sense have mercy on your poor, silly soul!"

There was no signature, no hint as to authorship save in that delicate scent; but the gambler forced himself to read those lines over for the second time ere replacing the anonymous warning in his pocket-book, just as he had discovered it.

For a time he seemed stunned afresh by this latest blow below the belt—for only a coward could or would have written thus—and for that period the gray gelding took his own course, his own pace.

Then Preston rallied once again, tossing back his head, swelling out his chest, shaking a clinched hand as though in fierce defiance of malicious fate.

"It's a lie—it's all a lie, and I just know it!" he broke forth harshly, though his working features flatly belied his speech, even as his next sentence contradicted it. "I'll kill her if she's fooling me! Why not, anyhow? Surely 'twould be a fitting end to all this toil and trouble! Why not? This life is nothing better than a living hell, and the other world can't be much worse, I take it!" he added, laughing harshly as he spurred his mount swiftly onward.

### CHAPTER III.

#### A LOVER IN AMBUSH.

The twilight was just deepening into night when Mayo Preston paused for a moment in front of the building where resided Mrs. Eloise Houghton, the fair young widow whose name had been so strangely used in the anonymous note of that memorable day.

He had left his horse at the boarding-stables, and had taken time to rearrange his dress, no less than his countenance, that only betrayed his recent fierce passions by its unusual pallor, just now.

The mellow lights showed dimly through the lace curtains, and something akin to a flush of shame came to his handsome face as Preston thought of her proud surprise when he should make known the excuse for his calling on that, one of the two forbidden evenings of each week.

"It's all an infernal lie, but—"

That poisonous barb rankled too deeply in his jealous heart, and without stopping to reflect further, Mayo Preston sprung up the broad stone steps, giving an almost savage touch to the door-gong.

The response was almost immediate, but the trimly garbed maid who answered his summons, flushed warmly and stammered a few words which the gambler did not attempt to interpret.

Pushing the door wider, he stepped across the threshold, saying:

"Your mistress, Annie: where'll I find her now?"

"Please, sir, this isn't—that is, sir—"

But, Preston was already pressing past her, making for the room in which he had spent so many blissful hours of late.

He paused at that door, a shade of impatience darkening his brow as he saw the softly-illuminated apartment was empty; but then he turned his head to add:

"I'll wait here for her coming, then. She'll not be long, now?"

"I'm afraid, sir," stammered Annie, looking curiously confused for one of her usual dispositions. "If you would only call a little later, when mistress is—when she comes in, that is? Shall I show you—"

"I'll wait till she comes in, then," interrupted Preston, entering the room and closing the door, even as he added: "Tell Mrs. Houghton I'm waiting, will you, when she returns?"

For a brief space Mayo Preston stood motionless, just inside that richly-furnished apartment, his eyes roving around the room yet evidently without seeing aught of interest sufficient to catch or to hold his attention.

That ugly frown had come back to his face, now, for those black suspicions were rankling with renewed force.

Why was it Eloise Houghton denied him admission to her presence on those two evenings of each and every week? Why should

the housemaid look so confused, so nearly frightened at his entering the house on that particular Friday?

Were those evenings reserved for another suitor? If so, who could it be? And why so much secrecy on her part? Surely—"

A fierce curse arose in his throat as he recalled the bold, handsome face of the man whom he had that day publicly branded as cheat and trickster—the face of Clifford Carpenter, the Plunger!

Was it possible that Eloise— Surely ho! That ugly suspicion turned him fairly sick at heart, although he tried to assure himself it could never be.

How often they had mocked at and made rare sport of the red-haired magnate of the race-course! And now—Eloise Houghton in love with Clifford Carpenter!

Mayo Preston sunk back in an easy-chair, face lowering to meet his unsteady hands, remaining thus for several minutes, while his dark and forbidding thoughts fairly ran riot.

But, presently, he rallied, rising to his feet as he gave an impatient glance at his watch, frowning and curling his mustached lip as that suspense grew almost unbearable.

To and fro he strode, his steps giving forth no echo, thanks to the soft velvet pile, and at each turn near those draperies he glanced into the adjoining room; the apartment which was usually held sacred to Mrs. Eloise Houghton, but within which some of his most blissful hours had been passed of late.

Now—

At each turn his steps lingered, and then he stood with one hand parting those curtains further, that scowl fading out of his face the while. For here he could not doubt Eloise, no matter what—

So Mayo Preston was assuring himself when his slowly roving gaze rested upon the little table on which writing materials could be seen, and all of which bore evidence of recent usage.

Stepping swiftly forward, he paused beside the table with right hand partly extended to grasp the tablet of paper lying half covered with a blotter, just above the upper edge of which he could catch a glimpse of writing.

Once again the hot flush of shame sprung to his face, but then, as he recalled those stinging questions so strangely put into his possession, he hesitated no longer, and brushing aside that blotter, he breathlessly read those few damning words.

It seemed to be but the continuation of a letter, or note, for the top line began in the middle of a sentence, the fragment reading thus:

"—not fail you, darling! I will come as early as I can, though that may be a trifle later than the hour named. Still, come I will! Why should I hesitate longer, when you are all in all to me, dearest? And so I repeat: expect me at the Druid's Oak, when the—"

Right there showed a large blot of ink, as though pen had fallen from hand through accident or sudden emotion; but Mayo Preston had seen sufficient to arouse that fierce demon in his breast, and with a savage oath he tore off that page and crumpled the paper in his nervous grasp.

With a half-dazed look upon his paling visage he glanced slowly around that apartment, then staggered back to the outer room. There he opened the crumpled sheet with hands that trembled like one sorely afflicted with an ague, reading again those lines, so vague in meaning to a stranger, but so full of bitterest intelligence to him, the lover!

It was an appointment with a lover! What were those words of warning?

"Ask her whom she meets twice each week under the Druid's Oak!"

The sorely stricken man gave a start and looked quickly around the room, for those words seemed pronounced by a living voice, just then.

Where was Eloise? The maid had told him her mistress was out, but did that mean—could it be possible this was the night on which that appointment was to be kept? Even now Eloise—

"I'll kill them both if I find them there!"

Thrusting that sheet of paper into his breast pocket, Mayo Preston caught up his hat and left the room, striding swiftly along the empty passage to the front door which he

opened for himself, never giving the maid further thought, just then.

He gained the pave without attracting attention, so far as he knew, and at once hurried swiftly away through the night like one who has an important end in view.

The distance he had to cover was great enough, however, to allow the gambler to school his countenance in goodly measure, and when he finally reached the stables at which he kept his brace of saddle horses, there was naught in his face or manner to awaken either curiosity or suspicion.

A word was sufficient to procure his second nag, and as the black was brought forth, the hostler ventured to observe:

"Looks pretty much like a shower, boss! Leastwise, ef them hurryin' clouds don't tell a blamed lie, anyway!"

"I'll dodge the drops, then," tersely answered Preston, putting foot to stirrup and swinging himself into the saddle. "Wish me better luck, Darby, when you wet your whistle with that!"

A silver coin rung musically as it fell upon a nail-head, and when the hostler rose erect from that eager scramble, the liberal Sport was beyond his range of vision.

There was every indication of a coming storm, but Mayo Preston did not give the clouded heavens a second glance, sending his good steed forward in a space-devouring trot, thinking only of reaching Forest Park with as little loss of time as possible.

It could not be called a long ride, although the rendezvous named was at the city limits in that direction, but each rod seemed a mile, each moment an age of torture to the jealous lover!

Fiercely he spurred his willing steed onward, his brain a confused jumble of hopes and fears, doubts and wavering trust, the lines of those two unsigned notes blending together until he could hardly have told one from the other.

Entering the Park, Mayo Preston rode at a more moderate gait to a point not far removed from the hoary old tree which was locally known as the Druid's Oak; then dismounting and leaving his horse without hitching, knowing that the well-trained animal would hardly go astray, even in the face of a storm such as seemed to be brewing that night.

Pausing only long enough to make sure the revolver he carried was safe at hand, and taking with him his riding-whip, the gambler pressed straight ahead for the Druid's Oak.

As he drew nearer that landmark, Preston slackened his pace and used more caution than he had as yet displayed; for—

"I'll kill 'em both if I catch them there!"

Over and over those words were ringing through his brain, and just then the jealous lover was a murderer in heart, if not in fact.

But, the end was not to come after that fashion for all seemed wasted, since neither man nor woman could be found in waiting when that hoary old monarch of the forest was reached.

The full moon was shining down through a rift in the dark clouds, and by its imperfect light Preston examined the green turf about that huge, gnarled trunk; but if sign were there, he failed to note it.

Then, drawing back to a fairly perfect ambush, the gambler-lover watched and waited, fighting against his gloomy conviction that in love, as in betting, he was fated to lose all!

For full half an hour he kept watch and ward after this fashion, but without aught happening to solve his ugly doubts; and hope was once again reviving when he gave a sudden start, catching his breath sharply as he leaned forward in acute attention.

Surely that was the stroke of an iron-shod hoof? Surely that other sound meant the passing of wheels over a rocky patch of the not far distant road?

Waiting barely long enough to make sure his ears had not deceived him, Mayo Preston sprung hastily through the undergrowth, making for the open road by the shortest practicable route.

He never stopped to ask himself what he meant to do, or what he expected to confront; his sole thought then was to intercept that carriage and learn for certain whether or not Eloise Houghton had elected that mode of

conveyance in preference to her saddle, in deference to the menacing storm-clouds.

Rapidly as Mayo forced his passage through the undergrowth he was none too soon in gaining the road, for, as he came out in view of that beaten track, the desperate gambler caught sight of a closed cab coming at a brisk trot, almost directly toward him.

At that instant the moon showed her round face near a fleeting cloud, and Preston could make out the figure of the driver, but not with sufficient distinctness for recognition.

He sprung out into the middle of the road, flinging up his whip-hand as he called a halt in stern yet husky tones:

"Hold up, you fellow! I want to know—"

The driver gave a cry of angry surprise, but jerked up his horse with almost cruel haste, and then the gambler strode quickly to the side of the cab, his free hand going out in advance to grasp the door-handle.

From the interior came a harsh ejaculation in a masculine voice, but Preston paid no attention to that, for just then he caught an indistinct glimpse of a white, frightened face as it turned toward that open window, and from his own lips came a harsh cry:

"You, Eloise! I thought—"

That face was forced aside, as an oath exploded inside the cab, and Mayo Preston in voluntarily started back, partly turning around as he caught the moonlight dimly reflected from a silver mounted revolver!

Another face briefly showed itself at the window just then, but a gloved hand and an arm came first!

In that hand showed a revolver, and then—a spout of red flame briefly lighted up the scene, and, with a choking cry of mortal agony, the gambler-lover flung up both hands, staggering away from the side of the cab, reeling like one drunken with strong waters!

Then his foot caught against some slight obstacle, and falling forward, much as a water-soaked log might fall, Mayo Preston lay still and motionless!

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### A MAN WITHOUT MERCY.

At the same instant the man on the box-seat swung his lash sharply and sent his snorting horse onward, even as there came an angry snarl from the interior, with the words:

"Drive on, you idiot! Do you want the footpads to strip us clean? Drive on, or—"

The off-wheel struck a protruding root, causing the vehicle to jolt and sway on its elastic springs so violently as to cut that angry speech short.

There was a faint scream from feminine lips, through horror at that vicious shot rather than the jolt, however; and dropping the weapon he had so ruthlessly used, the man grasped his present companion in his arms, crushing her down upon the seat beside him, harshly saying:

"Quiet, girl! If you only knew— The robbers are after us yet!"

"Don't— I never— So cruel!" huskily panted the woman, struggling against his superior strength in spite of the awful sickness which she felt coming over her just then.

"Would you rather be shot than— Pah! I'm a fool myself for even thinking— So, my lady!"

"Don't— Let me go, sir! What harm have I ever done you? Why have you so basely— Oh! let me go! let me go, I beg!"

"For those thieves to treat you a thousand-fold worse?" sternly retorted the man, still holding her helpless in spite of her efforts to break away from his unwelcome embrace.

"Anything—anything rather than— I will go, then!"

"Out in all this ugly storm, my poor child?" the man persisted, his tones taking on an almost fatherly cadence to match the words. "Why will you be so foolish, girl? Why not make the best of what you can't well help? And those footpads might—"

"A lie! He was not a robber, but— Oh, sir, let me go! Why do you treat me so shamefully, when I never wronged you or yours? Why have you decoyed me away from those who might defend me—a poor, friendless orphan?"

With a wailing cry in which indignation blended with grief and affright, the woman strove anew to break away; but still in vain.

A half-stifled curse came from the other occupant, and jerking the girl forcibly across his lap, he wound an arm around her shoulders, one gloved hand gripping her throat with cruel force, while its mate produced a damp sponge to press it close against her lips and nostrils.

"Since nothing less will content you, wildcat, take this!" he said, grimly, showing no pity as he stifled that wild cry of despair.

The cab came to an abrupt halt, and the driver bent downward to utter:

"Want ary help, boss? Shell I 'light an' tie, jest to— Eh?"

"No, you ass!" came the harsh response. "Go ahead! Get there as soon as you know how, and leave me to manage this dainty piece of dry-goods."

"All right, boss! You done salivated that cove, though, didn't ye? I never see ary critter so slickly done up in all my 'sperience! An' I do reckon as how—"

"Cork it up, I say!" with a vicious energy making itself felt as well as heard, just then. "Go on, and make time, ye fool! Or—shall I measure you out a dose of the same medicine, then?"

"Holy smoke—no, sir!" exploded the driver, cracking his whip and sending the willing horse ahead at a rapid gait once more.

Only partially recovered from an earlier dose of the anaesthetic, the girl was in poor condition to make a fight for either freedom or for the retention of her senses.

Even so soon she was yielding, though she fought with all her feeble power against the chloroform with which that sponge was saturated, and the noxious fumes from which rose so strongly that he who manipulated the stupefying drug felt obliged to avert his own face and draw nearer to the cab-window into which blew the damp night air.

By this time the swiftly-trotting horse had carried them clear of the Park, and as the man with the sponge glanced through the window to make sure of their progress, he saw that they were just swinging into the Central Plank Road.

All at once the rigid muscles of his victim relaxed, and after a brief period of suspicious waiting and watching, he felt assured that the drug had produced its desired effect; that this was no desperately cunning feint on the maiden's part in hopes of thus escaping the vigilance of her captor.

Although as a rule that was a well-frequented route, not a living soul was met during those few miles' rapid progress, for, like one already posted, the driver swung fairly clear of Colman, striking the main road when beyond that village.

Some little time after this the cab was halted for a brief space, and once more the driver spoke to his fare:

"Ef 'twasn't quite so pesky dark, boss, mebbe I'd know fer my own self, but, this is whar we take a side-shoot, hain't it?"

"Swing to the right, yes," impatiently answered the inside passenger. "I thought you said you knew every foot of the road?"

"You kin jest bet I do, too, boss, but that's when she hain't so dug-gun nigh like the inside of a nigger's black cat's sootiest kitten down a deep sullar at midnight when thar's a 'clipse on—that's what!"

"Drive on, and make time, you infernal idiot!"

"All right, boss! I cain't go bu'st 'thout you keep me comp'ny, ary how! So—g'lang, you but-eend o' chain-lightnin', thar!"

Leaving the Plank Road at an abrupt angle, the cab sped on through the night, their way only illuminated at long intervals by the moon, for the storm-clouds grew thicker and looked more threatening, though as yet not a drop of rain had fallen in their vicinity.

The traveling was far different from what it had been as long as the main road was taken, and only a few minutes crept by before the inside passenger felt forced to caution his driver to more prudence, if lesser speed.

"All right, boss! You're runnin' the ole shebang, an' it's you fer to pay the damidges!"

An' so—stiddy goes, my dandy-jack in harness!"

There were two other "side-shoots" taken before that night-ride reached its further limit, but then the cab was halted only a short distance from a dark and gloomy-looking building which stood in a scattering grove of tall trees.

The driver sprung down to open the door for his master, but his further assistance was declined, almost harshly.

"Keep an eye on your rig, Dick Bangs, and if any spy should come prowling around this way—croak him!"

"Jest es ef I held a dee-plomer, boss!" cheerfully assented that worthy, giving way for the burdened man.

Though he looked anything rather than a giant or an athlete, "the boss" seemed to find no difficulty in managing that burden, moving at a quick, smooth pace from cab to house, where he set one hand at liberty long enough to give a sharp, peculiar rapping upon the portal.

With a promptitude which more than hinted at a previous understanding between them, the door was opened by a woman, and passing inside, the portal was as swiftly closed and secured behind him.

"You've turned the trick then, master?" the woman asked, bending curiously forward in her eagerness to view that insensible burden. "It looked so stormy, and seemed so much later than I counted on, I'd nearly given you up for this—"

"Feet, not tongue, my chattering jay!" bluntly cut in the man, pulling the soft felt hat further down over his brows. "Must I stand here all night while you talk me blind? Get a move on, Mother Godfrey!"

"He! he! So full of life! So full of fun! He! he! he!" chuckled the old hag, shuffling forward with lamp held up to the more surely light his passage.

They entered another room, in which stood a low bed, and without further ceremony the man placed his unconscious victim upon the cover, drawing a long breath as though glad to be relieved of his burden.

"Sweet as a pink! Purty as a white, white rose! It's you for 'em, Master Ul—"

"Shut trap, you limber-tongued idiot!" angrily interposed the man, at the same time swinging a gloved hand sharply across those lips. "How many times have I warned you to never call me by name?"

"With nobody to hear, master—"

"Walls have ears, as you'd ought to have learned long ago, Mother Godfrey," retorted the man, in slightly less harsh tones; then glancing briefly at the motionless shape lying there on the outside of the bed, he added: "Look after her, Mother, as though each hair of her head held a rare and precious jewel! Care for her tenderly as you know how, but—don't let her run away from this, or I'll flay you alive!"

Coarse, hardened, reckless though her face plainly betokened, Mother Godfrey shrank shivering away from those glittering eyes, then hurriedly mumbled a pledge to do her duty without fail.

"That's all I ask of you, Mother, but that much I expect, even as I stand ready to pay for just that amount of service. Now give her your very best care right away. She's only drugged a bit, and will come around all right in an hour or less."

Adding a few minor instructions, the man left that room, lighted to the front door by Mother Godfrey, who quickly closed and barred the passage behind him.

Hurrying across to where the cab stood in waiting, casting a keen look upward over the cloud-veiled vault, the man sprung nimbly from ground to the box-seat, saying as he did so:

"I'll go shares with you, Bangs. I'd rather risk a toss from here, than take a tumble inside, this nasty night!"

"Which I'm tryin' to hope ye hain't crossin' our good luck by sayin' of it, boss!" almost surlily growled the driver as he closed the door and climbed up to his seat.

"I'm not your hoodoo, Dick, though I reckon I was of that fellow who jumped out at us so terrible brash! And—I say, Bangs?"

"All ears open, boss," responded the driver as they rolled swiftly off through the night.

"Did you recognize that footpad in the Park, Richard?"

"Never a once, boss, so I didn't—fer true!" came the answer; possibly too prompt for the naked truth!

"Neither did I," placidly declared his employer. "Of course we acted strictly inside the limits of the law, for he tried to hold us up; didn't he, Richard?"

"That's a solid what, boss!"

"And hence, if he was really hurt—though I shot to scare, not to hit, Richard; didn't I?"

"Looked that way to me, boss, fer a fact! An' the hoss was so bad skeered he kep' the cab on a wiggle! An' so—waal, ef thar was ary fool' critter done got hurt, 'twas all a accident, boss!"

They both laughed shortly; then something passed from hand to hand there in the dark, and the master added:

"A silent tongue is well worth paying for, Richard, and in case no awkward questions come our way we'll—well, forget that anything of the sort occurred. Eh, my fine fellow?"

"I kin 'most make my davy she never did happen, boss!"

Another mutual laugh, then silence fell between the well-matched couple, broken thereafter only by such remarks as the nature of their journey made necessary.

They avoided crossing Forest Park, and then drove briskly through a portion of the town, Dick Bangs letting his employer out at a street corner, only a short distance from the residence into which we saw Mayo Preston force his way that evening, early.

Springing lightly up these steps, the man entered without going through the formality of ringing or rapping, leaving his hat at the rack in the hall, pulling off his gloves as he strode along to the apartment in which the ruined gambler had passed those minutes of impatient waiting for the woman whose face he was destined never more to gaze upon, either in love, in reproach, or in hatred for her treachery.

That woman sprung from an easy-chair at the coming of the man, and a warm glow suffused her more than comely face as she eagerly asked.

"What luck, Ulrich? Well?"

"It is well, Eloise, and yet—"

He cut his answer short at that, a half-sneer curling his lips as he sunk into an easy-chair, looking up at that eager face.

"And yet—what?" sharply demanded the woman, her jetty brows beginning to contract. "Out with it, Ulrich Farquhar! Surely you've not made a botch of it, after all my precautions?"

"And yet—I'm not so sure you'll say it's well, Eloise, my girl!" slowly uttered Farquhar, that mocking smile fading away.

"What do you mean, Farquhar? Out with it, like a man, can't you?"

A brief pause, then he slowly uttered the words:

"Well I got there, of course, but—I had to kill one man, first!"

## CHAPTER V.

### A PRECIOUS PAIR IN COUNCIL.

FARQUHAR looked as though he rather expected a little outcry of some description at this, but for once he underestimated the power of woman's nerve.

Instead of showing either surprise or horror, Eloise Houghton gave a brief yawn, sinking back into the chair she had abandoned at his entrance, red lips curling as she languidly drawled forth the query:

"Are you lying, or merely joking, Ulrich?"

The man frowned a bit more darkly, looking a little less saint and more sinner just then. Yet even now, when he felt no need of wearing his conventional mask, Ulrich Farquhar was rarely beautiful for one of the sterner sex.

For years past he had been far better known as "Adonis" Farquhar, than by the name which had been given him at the christening font; nor had nearly two decades of reckless living and evil courses seriously marred that comeliness.

He looked far less than his thirty-seven years, and his slender yet muscular figure was as elegant as of yore.

A few lines were visible upon his fair

face just now, but when with this woman alone, Ulrich Farquhar felt no need of wearing a mask.

Pulling thoughtfully at his long, drooping mustaches; biting the yellow hairs with rare nervousness for one of his iron will and tempered nerves, the man remained silent for a brief space, like one who hardly knows the proper words to use.

Eloise Houghton gazed at him curiously for a time, that half-sneering smile fading away and leaving her red lips a thought less full, while tiny wrinkles gathered between and above her arching brows of jet.

"It's something worse than lie or jest, then, Adonis?" she asked, a bit later. "Your face tells me 'tis a mistake!"

"If you don't think it's anything worse than that, come to know it all, Queen!"

"Why not try me, then?"

"That's just what I'm going to do, my girl, so—steady, now!"

Pausing just long enough for a second breath, Ulrich Farquhar began his explanation abruptly, both words and manner plainly showing that his present companion knew what sort of adventure he had been engaged upon that evening.

"It happened where the road makes its bend nearest the Druid's Oak in Forest Park, you understand, Eloise? Right there a fellow jumped out from cover and called a halt, just as though he meant it, too!"

"And you—croaked him?"

"Wait a bit, please! He stuck head in at window, and called out your name, just as though—"

"My name?" echoed the woman, with an involuntary start.

"Eloise—no less!"

"Who was it, then?"

"Mayo Preston!"

Again Ulrich Farquhar evidently expected an explosion, but once more he was agreeably disappointed. That frown deepened a bit, but Eloise Houghton betrayed no further sign of anger or surprise.

"I felt sure of as much! Now—did he recognize you, think?"

"How could he? The moon was nearly behind us, and just going under a cloud at that. Still—he called your name!"

"I can understand that part of it, but—go on; you say he could not have recognized either one of you?"

"Not without he had eyes like a cat. But I'm not so sure of the girl, don't you know?"

"How so?"

"Well, the moon was in his face, and a bit later—after we passed on—she wouldn't swallow what I said about footpads and robbers."

"You were idiot enough to argue with her then?"

"Well, hardly that bad," and Farquhar told how he had managed the rest of the affair, drugging his captive and leaving her under the guardian wing of Mother Godfrey, then speeding back to the city again.

After this there was another pause, during which the woman seemed buried in deep and certainly not agreeable thought.

Presently she lifted her eyes to that marvelously perfect face opposite, speaking slowly, distinctly.

"I've got a little something to say, too, Adonis, which may still further complicate matters."

"All ears open, Queen."

"I was away at dusk; you can guess where, of course?"

"Laying the scent, of course?"

"Yes. And while I was absent, he came here?"

"The gudgeon, you mean?"

"Of course, who else should it be?" with a touch of irritation in her tones at these repeated interruptions. "Lock your lips, can't you, man? For, if I'm not missing my guess, there's plenty of work ahead of us before we can hope to fairly smooth this all over!"

"Go ahead, Queen; I'm an oyster from this onward."

The woman briefly detailed how Mayo Preston had called at that house, almost forcing an entrance in spite of the well-trained maid, then waved a hand toward the little table where still stood materials for writing.

"He closed the door upon Annie, and

though she listened for a time, she could hear nothing to show what the silly fellow might be doing with himself while waiting."

"May the oyster open his shell, Queen?"

"Why not, you *non compos*?"

"Thanks! Most people brand me knave, you know! Well—about this fellow: I thought Tuesdays and Fridays were under taboo, so far as he was concerned!"

"You know it, Adonis!"

"Yet he came here, you say? Until now Preston has shown himself obedience personified, why this infraction, pray?"

"That's what's troubling me, for one thing!" exclaimed Eloise, flinging forth a hand in fierce annoyance as her brows gathered still more blackly. "What set him on fire, just then? Who could have given him a hint as to— And right now, of all times!"

Those blue eyes were keenly if covertly watching the woman, reading her face as one might peruse a printed page; and now Farquhar spoke in his turn.

"This begins to look as though I had company in my mistake-making, old lady! Surely you were not idiot enough to leave anything lying on the loose? You never play a wrong card, and so—"

"Why didn't you grant me more time, then? Why did you rush matters so hotly, all at once?"

"Because I saw a chance which might never again present itself so neatly, as I explained to you to-day, Eloise."

"Well, it's bad enough, though it might be still worse!"

"For instance?"

"You know what I had to write, of course? Well, with so little margin to go on, of course I couldn't give thought to every minor point. And so—I knew you alone was to be expected this evening, or this night. And so—you begin to comprehend, do you?"

"You left some of your writing yonder?" asked Farquhar, following her eyes as they turned once more toward that writing-stand.

The woman nodded assent before adding the words.

"The first draft of the blotted sheet, you understand?"

"And you think Preston saw it?"

"Judge for yourself, Adonis," growing a bit more composed as she again reclined in that cushioned seat. "I know I left the draft yonder, when I went forth to lay the false trail. It was missing when I returned. And no person save Mayo Preston was in here during my absence."

"Unless the girl—"

"I can answer for her, as for myself, Ulrich. No, he must have had his suspicions awakened by something or somebody, else he never would have forced an entrance here on this evening. And then—"

"What could he have learned by reading that draft, Queen? How did the wording run, anyway?"

For answer, Eloise passed over to the little-table, rapidly reproducing the lines which had so powerfully agitated the unfortunate gambler, then handed the paper to her ally.

"See for yourself, Adonis!"

Farquhar quickly glanced over those still damp lines, then looked up to ask:

"Was it in this hand, Queen, or in the other?"

"In this, of course. Did I have so much time that I could afford to waste it on seeming trifles? And—of course that silly coot recognized my hand, he surely must have thought I was meditating an elopement with a more favored lover!"

Eloise broke into a low, musical laugh just then, which certainly betrayed precious little remorse or regret for the poor dupe who had been lured to his doom by those false lines.

But, Ulrich Farquhar seemed hardly satisfied with that brief mirth, else the fire which burned in his steeple eyes spoke falsely.

His frown deepened as the woman ceased laughing to grow grave, her face showing deeper anxiety or emotion than he liked, just then.

After a brief silence, Eloise Houghton looked up, to surprise that now fairly vicious scowl, and she almost involuntarily exclaimed:

"What's biting you, Adonis? Surely it isn't— Then you were lying about it's being Preston whom you laid out, over yonder in the Park?"

"Don't you think it, girl! 'Twas Mayo

Preston safe enough, and I'm heartily glad of it, too!"

"Then what's the matter, man, dear? You look as though I had committed rankest treason—or worse!"

"Is it so mighty sure you haven't, Queen?"

"Steady, Ulrich! Don't let your rash tongue get fairly away with you, this night of all others! As for Mayo Preston—"

"As for him, I'm glad he tried to turn such a trick, seeing how it's ended! I never did like him, but you—you were growing to like him too mighty well, Eloise!"

The woman uttered a low laugh—one of undisguised scorn at this outburst of jealousy. She flung out a hand in a gesture of contempt as she spoke in her turn:

"You're foolish, man, dear! Jealous? And of Mayo Preston?"

"Haven't I had good cause, Eloise?"

"Not on my part, and that's dead honest, Ulrich," leaning forward to meet his hand with her own, speaking rapidly as their fingers closed upon each other: "I never liked the man, though 'twas plain policy to play I did. You know that, Ulrich?"

"Of course, only—"

"I did like the silly moth's money, though, but you've no cause to pick a quarrel on that score, either, dear! For—haven't you had the lion's share of all he lost?"

Farquhar shrugged his shapely shoulders for reply, and releasing her fingers, Eloise drew back as before, to add in changed tones:

"Let that flea stick by the wall, then, Adonis. And now—just what are you going to do about this nasty little accident?"

"If you mean about Preston, just nothing at all," coolly answered the adventurer, stroking his blond mustaches.

"Nothing at all, you say?"

"Just that, unless I'm forced to act differently. Of course, if the fact should be traced to my door—which can hardly be—I'll make no bones about telling the simple truth."

"Which is, for instance?"

"That an unknown fellow tried to hold me up as I was driving through Forest Park on private business. That I fired a shot to scare him off, but saw no signs of his being hit by the bullet. That my horse was so badly frightened by the explosion he ran away, and could only be stopped by my driver when we were at the Park limits."

"To all of which your driver stands ready to make oath, of course."

"Well, that goes without saying, doesn't it, Queen?" with a languid smile coming into his beautiful countenance. "And so—masterly inactivity is the password!"

"You forget that bit of writing, Ulrich! Preston surely took it away with him! And—'twas in my own hand, remember, man!"

"Well, what of that? No name was mentioned, and even if found upon his person—"

"It must be found—and found by you!" the woman cried, almost viciously. "There's no time to waste, I tell you, man! Go now—go at once to the Park, and bring me back that paper, I say!"

"Thanks, Queen, but I really don't have to! And, suppose it should be found? Who can swear that you wrote it? Then, why wouldn't his death be laid to the account of Cliff Carpenter, after their shindy of today? The Plunger threatened to play even, remember!"

"Eureka!" cried Eloise, springing to her feet with a clear laugh.

## CHAPTER VI.

### LAVING A FALSE TRAIL.

It was by no means an uncommon thing for the fair Mrs. Houghton to be seen in the saddle and well under way with her trotting thoroughbred as the sun first peeped above the horizon; so those few who saw her set forth for a brisk constitutional on the morning after the abortive storm, felt more of admiration than of surprise.

The chestnut carried its fair burden rapidly away from the heart of the residence portion of the Mound City, then swung into the more direct road for Forest Park—one of

the pleasant "breathing places" so essential to the health of a great city.

The glowing disk of the day-god was hardly visible from there as the fair young widow entered the Park, her cheeks flushed with rosy health, her big black eyes sparkling with animation, her whole appearance that of one who has never a care, grief or trouble in this life.

Yet she was intently searching the limits on all sides as she progressed, knowing that a single false step taken now might end in twisting a rope for the neck of her nearest friend, and just as surely open the bars of the penitentiary for her own admission.

She caught a glimpse of a mounted policeman, no doubt one of those to whom the guardianship of the parks was intrusted by the chief of police; but his back was turned her way, and his stalwart figure had taken upon itself a sleepy stoop which flatly contradicted the idea of his having any knowledge of what ghastly object might be lying near the Druid's Oak.

Keeping a wary eye upon that figure until she was securely hidden from even his casual glance, the young widow pressed on, making an irregular circuit rather than directly approaching the hoary old tree.

Through all she wore that smiling mask, and had any person met or sighted her during that leisurely detour, not even the ghost of a suspicion would have been aroused.

It was not until her circuit was complete that Eloise Houghton took it for granted that she was indeed alone in that part of the Park. Then she cut no further time to waste, riding up the road with eyes bent upon those wheel-marks, still visible to the unassisted eye.

Soon she saw a torn and trampled space of ground, where she presumed the pretended "hold-up" must have taken place; and riding closer, her white teeth closed sharply, for there, close beside the road and plainly showing on a few white stones, lay drops and splashes of still bright-hued blood!

One cautionary glance around to make sure no patrolman had come into her field of vision, then Eloise Houghton looked about for that gruesome witness—the corpse!

She caught her breath sharply, gasping in husky tones:

"Gone! Some one has found and—Curse the crooked luck!"

There was little of beauty left in that face just now. Instead of humanity, there was a look far nearer akin to that which a baffled panther might wear.

In her vicious disappointment, Mrs. Houghton struck her spirited mount with the whip, and as he plunged forward, she caught an indistinct glimpse of something which caused her heart to give a mighty bound, and her strong if small hands to wrench the horse back upon its haunches.

Rising with her whole weight upon the stirrup, she peered keenly in that direction, then broke into a low, bubbling laugh as she let her horse walk onward, her sparkling eyes once more flashing wary glances around in all directions.

Still there was no sign of approaching officers, or chance wayfarers, and then making a little turn in order to draw nearer that object from cover, the widow in a few seconds more drew rein, gazing down upon the ghastly pale face of a human being!

The face of Mayo Preston, who had been driven to his doom by her false hand!

He was lying on his back, with one arm doubled underneath his body, its mate stretched out at full length. His head was bent backward, and upon his face was frozen a look of agony, while his curling brown locks were dabbled in blood and dirt.

Toward the nearly hidden road lay the painful trail he had made after rallying briefly from the first shock of that pitiless bullet. He had struggled thus far toward the Druid's Oak, as though he even in death clung to the thoughts of what had brought him hither.

All this Eloise Houghton took in at a glance, then again she looked around in all directions, bending her trained ear in acute listening.

Only the ordinary sounds of a fresh, early morning greeted her hearing, and slipping reins over the pommel of her saddle, she dropped to earth, approaching the corpse of her betrayed lover, still cool enough to

make sure each step was planted where no sign would be left, be it on stone or on stick.

As she did this, her right hand rested upon the revolver which Ulrich Farquhar had relinquished at her demand, and which she had expected to make use of in laying that false trail, unless—

"Where is the wound, though?" she muttered, frowning darkly as she saw how unmarred was that handsome face. "Why didn't he—suicide would make all look so much neater, too!"

Stooping over the body, Eloise Houghton looked for the wound, giving a brief sniff of disgust as she saw that it surely was somewhere at the back of the skull.

"Just where no man would think of placing his gun in killing himself, of course! Adonis is not often an idiot, but he surely must have leaned that way last night! Why couldn't he have—Steady, my girl!"

She thrust back the revolver which she had produced as possible evidence, then gave one other wary glance around, before searching that body for the bit of writing which she had missed at home.

The beautiful lure, reassured, ran her hand in his breast pocket and drew forth the betraying note, crumpled as though by an angry hand; and only pausing long enough to make sure that it was indeed what she wanted, Eloise thrust the paper into her own deep and secure pocket.

Then she briskly searched the dead man, betraying no little dexterity in the art of rifling pockets, taking care not to disturb aught or to leave any sign by which her interference might be inferred.

She extracted that silver clasped pocket-book, and from it took the anonymous note, giving a low, vicious hiss as she saw her own name used after such a dangerous fashion.

"Who could have warned him? Who could know—ah-h-h!" with fierce sibilation. "That spiteful, jealous cat—Claudine Vaughn!"

Warned by this totally unexpected discovery that other agencies had been at work under cover, Eloise Houghton pressed her search with rapid thoroughness, ending with extracting the revolver from where it still rested in Preston's hip-pocket.

"It can't be suicide—worse luck!" the unsexed woman muttered as she rose erect, with a long breath. "But, shall it be brutal murder, then?"

An almost fiendish expression marked her strong features as she asked herself this question, and a hand slipped into her bosom, to come forth with a folded sheet of paper.

Kneeling once more, the widow slipped this paper into the dead man's vest pocket, then drew back with a low, bubbling laugh of gratified malice and no little relief.

"One for your nob, my proud and skittish Plunger!" she muttered; but she gave a sudden start as her unusually keen ears caught a distant sound.

She stood like a statue of alert alarm, one hand reaching out toward her waiting steed, the other cur'd with gloved palm resting back of an ear as she listened for repetition of that sound.

It failed to come, just then, and she beat a cautious retreat to the side of her horse, now as before guarding against leaving aught that could show she had left the saddle at all.

Springing lightly into the saddle, Eloise paused to gaze for a few seconds upon that face: still more than ordinarily handsome even in death and then she heaved a long sigh, muttering barely above her breath:

"Poor lad! A fool, maybe, but he deserved a better fate than this! To be shot down without a chance to defend himself! To die in the dark and in the dirt—the death of a mangy cur! While he—Ha!"

She broke off abruptly as the low yet distinct neigh of a horse came to her ears, and her grasp tightening upon both curb and snaffle, caused the chestnut gelding to plunge backward, his hoofs tearing up the earth as he recoiled.

Eloise Houghton saw this, and knew that she could not hope to blot out such a trail; but she rallied, urging her horse past that corpse and on to where she could obtain a

fair view of the winding road, yet still remain under cover herself.

With another little catch in her breath she caught sight of a mounted policeman riding leisurely along that road, heading her way, and realized the necessity for prompt and decisive action.

"A blind man couldn't pass those bloody stains without seeing them on those white stones and so—cheek, do your duty, now!"

Giving the revolver taken from the body a little toss ahead and to one side, the young widow spurred her steed sharply, sending him bounding out into the road, heading toward yonder lazily-moving policeman.

She uttered a shrill, seemingly terrified scream to attract his attention, at the same time wildly gesticulating with her whip-hand.

The patrolman sprung into swift life and swifter action, spurring his nag onward as he gave a reassuring shout to the oncoming equestrienne whose fair face looked fairly ghastly with fright and horror!

"What's the matter, ma'am?" hastily asked the officer as he rode up, but the woman never thought of waiting for his questions, gasping forth:

"Oh, sir! So awful—so horrible! A dead man—I'm sure he was dead, or else—Right there in my path—and I almost rode over him before I saw—Ugh!"

"Dead drunk, reckon!" muttering; but then asking: "Right where, if you please, ma'am? If you'll only show me where, we'll take a look at the fellow, anyway!"

"There—right there!" panted the terribly frightened lady, motioning with her whip. "I saw—Oh, sir, do you think I might have been mistaken? That he isn't—that he is—only drunken?"

But by this time the officer had advanced far enough to catch fair sight of that pistol lying near the splotches of blood, and leaping from saddle to ground, he quickly followed that staggering trail to where the lifeless body was lying, its face now illuminated by a ray of yellow sunshine.

One keen look, then the officer turned toward the woman, speaking in grave tones:

"You're right, and I was wrong, Mrs. Houghton; he's dead enough, for a solid fact!"

A swift flush came into her face at that address, and she said:

"What! You know me, then, sir?"

"Yes, ma'am," as he instinctively touched rim of helmet in salutation. "I was employed at the race-track, and so—I hear the sports are calling Carpenter's Dixie the queen of the turf, but—begging your pardon for being so bold, ma'am—I know who better deserves that proud title, ma'am!"

It was a compliment which might have been fully appreciated under other circumstances, but just now the Queen had something of vastly more importance on hand; and so she said, huskily:

"Oh, how I wish I had not come for my regular morning ride in this direction! If I had not—Oh, sir, must I become mixed up in that awful affair? Must I be called to bear witness to the finding of—Ugh! You will not—Must it be made public, then, dear sir?"

'Twas a bit of rare acting, and a far shrewder man than this officer might easily have been deceived by that broken, agitated plea, to say nothing of those moist eyes, those quivering lips, that clinging hand!

He hesitated, then forced a faint smile as he muttered:

"Maybe not, ma'am, unless—I'll try not to bring your name in, if you'll only—"

"Only what, my dear sir?" almost cooingly asked the young widow; and at the same moment she slipped a comfortable roll of bills into his bronzed hand. "The reporters are so terrible, now, and the idle gossip would be even worse! So, if I only might escape—But you said?"

"That I'll never mention your name, ma'am, as the first finder, if you'll just be so kind as to send me my pardner as you go out. He'll be nigh the entrance, I reckon, and so—Thank ye kindly, Mrs. Houghton!"

"Thanks—oh sir, so many hearty thanks!" the young widow murmured, as she lifted her daintily-booted foot for his willing palm, then rising gracefully to a seat in her saddle.

"I really could not tell anything more—I was so awfully frightened and—all that, you know!"

Under a thrust of the silver spur the gelding bounded off and Eloise Houghton rode swiftly away from the scene of death a bright yet evil smile lighting up her face as she muttered:

"That lets me out, thank the stars! And now, Clifford Carpenter: you and the hangman for it!"

## CHAPTER VII.

### JOCKEY JAP AND HIS MASTER.

It was another big day at the Track, in spite of its being the fag-end of the week, for those in authority had prepared an especially attractive programme for the lovers of sport, and "times were good" all over the land.

If anything the attendance bade fair to eclipse that of the day before, when the favorite lost her race through such a curious fluke, a goodly portion of the crowd no doubt owing to the many sensational rumors which had been set flying so briskly ever since "Jockey Jap" tried one of his "hair-raising finishes," and got fairly "nipped at the wire."

"Plunger" Carpenter was there, as a matter of course, and with him right now was Miles Honeyman, whom so few knew for what he really was: a keen-witted, shrewd and steel-nerved detective.

Tall and blond, with big blue eyes that looked sleepy at nearly all times, but which could flash and glow on occasion, Honeyman was usually set down for being a careless, happy-go-lucky follower of the races, who held scarcely an idea higher than a wish to "hit a winner," or to get on the scent of a "hog killing" without too great bodily or mental exertion.

Just now he was smiling quizzically into the florid but handsome face of the Plunger, whose curling red locks surely gave some token of his hot and generous temperament.

"You don't believe in painting the lily, I see, Carpenter," he said, with a little nod that further pointed his meaning. "A lovely pair of twins, anyway!"

The Plunger flushed a bit redder as a hand rose to his face, where only too plainly showed the signature written by the hard knuckles of the ruined gambler, Mayo Preston.

"They show up, then, you think?"

"Black as my hat, pardner!"

"So much the less danger of my forgetting where I got them, then," with grim coolness, a twin flash of dangerous fire coming from out that badly-discolored spot.

"I'd rather he had to pay you than I, for a fact!" confessed the Sporting Detective, keeping step with his friend as Carpenter passed on in the direction of his stables. "You haven't seen Preston to-day, then?"

"Not yet. He can wait. I'll ask for a settlement before this love-paint grows too dim, though!"

"And the Jap, Carpenter? What have you said to him?"

"That's another debt still owing, Honeyman; but we'll talk the rest of it later on. For just now—Hello!"

They were almost at the door of the stable when Carpenter gave vent to that ejaculation, and springing a vividly forward he entered the none too substantial structure, his usually smiling visage grown stern and forbidding on the instant.

It was right here that the Plunger expected to meet his regular trainer, to receive final instructions as to the manner in which the entered horses were to be ridden that afternoon.

Big Hummer was there, but with him was another person, and that individual was talking swift and viciously, just then.

Few who had once heard that voice could ever mistake it for another, for it was as peculiar as was the person to whom it belonged; the first shrill and quavering, like a cracked falsetto, the last looking like a cross between a monkey and a Chinaman!

"What's all this row about, anyway?" coldly demanded the Plunger, as he paused just inside the stable door, one hand rising to stroke his heavy red mustaches; an action

peculiar to him whenever a naturally hot and fierce temper bade fair to break all bounds.

Swift as thought itself that monkey-like shape whirled to face the speaker, and though a claw-like hand flew up to touch peak of silk cap, there was little else of respect or of homage perceptible in that quarter; almost the contrary, in fact.

"You, is it, Deagle? What are you doing with those colors on?"

"That's just what I was asking him, your Honor," cried the trainer, but falling back a bit as Carpenter gave him a curt nod.

"What else would I ride in, then?" shrilled the jockey, hands clinched and quivering with passion the while. "Hummer said I wasn't to go up to-day, and I was just asking why he—"

"Go up where?"

"To ride, of course! What else should—"

"Not for me, Jasper Deagle, thank you," coldly cut in his master. "I had too fair a specimen of your capabilities only yesterday, and now you want to crawl out of that rig as quick as you know how! Understand?"

Jockey Jap seemed almost dumfounded for an instant, staring with those narrow, slanting eyes, which had help'd fasten that title upon him, his yellow face showing more nearly the color of faded saffron, his breath coming hot and raspingly.

"Not ride, sir? I don't—I'm first jock as you know, sir, and here I am ready to go up at the first bell!"

"Not for me, I tell you, Deagle. You've ridden your last race under my colors until you can—Who bought you, Jockey Jap?"

Sharp and stern came that query, and the apish rider shrunk for the moment before those harsh words, much as though each word was a stroke of a whip. His foreign-looking face grew more contorted, and then he huskily panted forth:

"I don't—I never—what mean, you?"

"How much more did you get for losing than by letting Dixie clinch the race he had already won, you dirty snake?" sternly demanded the Plunger, taking a step forward as the jockey recoiled as far.

"I never—she swerved just as—"

"Just as you made her, you little ape!" thundered Carpenter, now for the first time giving reins to his fierce rage after so many hours of stern self-control. "You made her swerve, as the surest means of losing what she had already won, and now you dare—"

"A lie! You lie!" fairly screamed Jockey Jap, whipping a long and ugly knife from where it had lain hidden under his clothing, leaping like an enraged cat full at the broad breast of his master, one clawing hand shooting forth to grip his throat, the other striking with venomous fury as he came.

As a general rule Clifford Carpenter was fully capable of caring for himself under any and all conditions, but for this once he was really taken unawares; for who could even suspect this little ape of openly assaulting one so vastly his superior in every manly attribute?

But there was another hard at hand who acted with wonderful celerity, and as that glittering weapon fell, straight for the heart of the surprised Plunger, Jockey Jap's wrist was caught by Miles Honeyman, and as that stroke was checked before steel could touch flesh, just so that other strong hand gripped an arm near the shoulder and fairly hurled the venomous little rascal endlong a dozen feet away!

"Play ye don't, Jockey!" half-mockingly cried the Sporting Detective as he gave this unexpected exhibition of athletic training. "Show your diploma before you set up as surgeon, please, my hearty!"

Just how it all came to pass, not even Jockey Jap could tell, but he crouched there, disarmed, shivering from crown to sole, a little froth tinging his brown lips, his face looking even more venomous than front of enraged cobra.

"Ye devil! I'll play even for your trying to steal away my good name, Cliff Carpenter!" he fairly squealed, yet in tones so strained as to hardly reach beyond that inclosure.

"You never had a good name, Jasper Deagle, and since pulling Dixie yesterday, I'd rather kill every nag in my stables than see them disgraced by showing with you in the pigskin!"

"I'll kill you! I'll carve your heart into

shoestrings! I'll show all the world how to—Not now, you grinning devil, ye!"

Miles Honeyman took a step that way, but Jockey Jap did not wait to be reached, ducking under the nearest horse and then plunging into the dimly-lighted stalls beyond with a ratlike velocity which no grown man could hope to compete with.

"Shall I call the boys to run him down, sir?" eagerly asked the head trainer; but Carpenter gave a negative shake of the head, saying:

"No. Only see that he's driven out of bounds, and kept from stealing back again. I'd not put it past the imp, doping the nags, if he is let catch even half a chance; and so—Well, what is it?"

Almost harshly came that question as the Plunger whirled about to confront the men who just then blocked the entrance-way, and adding as he caught sight of a uniform:

"There's no aid required, gentlemen. Merely a bit of training down to weight, and so—Good-day to you, all!"

Instead of beating a retreat as thus invited, the intruders interchanged quick glances, then a man of middle age, dressed in plain clothes, stepped to the front, gravely speaking:

"Sorry, Mr. Carpenter, but the fact is—We'll have to ask your company to town, just now!"

The Plunger gave a slight start at that quiet speech, flushing hotly as he glanced from speaker to the couple of uniformed officers who bore him company.

"To town? What for, pray?"

"Just a matter of form, I'm hoping, sir," respectfully answered the detective, coming a bit nearer. "Of course you'll not be so foolish as to kick up a row over it, sir, and for our part—we'll cover it all over as well as we can, sir!"

"You, is it, Jackson?" cut in Miles Honeyman, sharply. "You've got a warrant, of course?"

"If you'd like to look at it, sir," said the detective, producing a printed form properly filled out, and holding it before the eyes of the Plunger.

Carpenter caught sight of one name, and gave a short, harsh laugh as one hand rose to touch his discolored optics.

"Mayo Preston, eh? Well, don't you think that's getting on the wrong horse, gentlemen? This is his signature, you see, and I still owe him pay—for this dainty hand-painting!"

But there was no show of mirth or of jesting visible in the face of Detective Jackson, and he gravely spoke again:

"The poor fellow's well past paying any such debt, sir, and that's—well, pretty much outlawed, I'd call it!"

His tone and manner far more than the words chosen gave Clifford Carpenter a curious shock, and he quickly demanded:

"Talk straight if you know how! What is this warrant for, if not because of the little racket we had yesterday?"

"Then you didn't read? It's for killing Mayo Preston!"

"What?"

"Don't say anything you may be sorry for later on, sir," quickly warned Beverly Jackson, at the same time briefly nodding to the officers who had borne him company to make that arrest sure. "I'll have to tell all I know, and all I hear, you understand, sir?"

"It's merely in the line of sworn duty, sir," gravely added one of the policemen, closing in with the detective. "We've got to take you back to town, but we'll do it just as decently as you'll let us, you understand?"

All this passed with rapidity, but the word spread with even more swiftness, and even so soon there was quite a crowd pressing around that particular section of the long line of stabling.

Bird Hummer, the head trainer, grasped an ugly-looking pitchfork, and a dozen or more stable lads had rudely armed themselves as though ready to rescue their beloved master; but Clifford Carpenter seemed fairly dazed by this totally unexpected blow, and moved more like a drunken man than one of his wonted fiery, full-of-life carriage.

As the Plunger was led forth from the stables by his present guardians, there came a shrill, eldritch screech of diabolical joy,

and, still wearing that gay suit of racing colors, Jockey Jap capered wildly about, flourishing his crooked arms and bowed legs, laughing and screeching, mocking and mowing, with now and then an articulate sentence making itself heard by all near that spot.

"He! he! he! Set me down, will ye? Steal my good name, eh? Rob me of my honor, just to cover your own dirty crookedness, then? Ah-ha! Who's in the darbies now, I want to know?"

Another mad fit of frantic capering, then another volley of oaths and revilings, hoots and jeers, with yet other wild mockings.

"Steal my good name to plaster up your own, will ye, Cliff Carpenter? Riding crooked colors may be bad, but how much worse is it to do a job the like o' yours? Crowning a race is awful, but what's croaking a stiff?"

Miles Honeyman had swung around behind the malicious imp, and now pounced upon him with a sure grip, rushing him inside the stable and dumping him head first into a feed-chest. He swiftly locked the lid, then ran off in haste to join the Plunger, who was being led away under guard, the picture of dazed helplessness.

### CHAPTER VIII.

#### THE SPORTING DETECTIVE REPORTS.

OUTSIDE, the whole world seemed full of peace and joy and content, in perfect keeping with the sweet-toned bells which were ringing for church services; but inside those steel bars!

Clifford Carpenter sat on the edge of his iron-framed cot, elbows resting on knees, hands supporting and covering his bruised face from view, with precious little of the outward praisegiving in his mind or his heart just now.

He had, for the first time in his busy life, spent a night inside prison walls, and he felt as though nothing could ever wipe off the foul stain of this surely unmerited disgrace.

He gave no sign as he heard the touch of key in lock, nor did he so much as move finger or lift an eye as the heavy door swung open to admit a visitor.

The door gave an audible sound as it closed again, but the tall figure thus admitted stood in silence as though waiting for a greeting at the prisoner's pleasure.

Something of this Carpenter must have felt, for after a bit he gave a low, half-surly groan, then muttered:

"What do you want, anyway?"

"A hand-grip, old fellow, if nothing warmer in the way of greeting," answered a familiar voice, and with a start the Plunger rose from his cot, to chokingly exclaim:

"You, Miles? I'd rather— It's bitter as death!"

"Because you haven't tried to look at it through the right end of the glass, old man!" briskly retorted the Sporting Detective, clasping those unsteady hands between his own cool yet cordial palms, beaming brightly into that haggard face, meeting those bloodshot eyes with his own keen orbs full of encouragement the while.

"Because the bars are so much easier to see, no doubt!" came the grim jest from a half-broken spirit. "And—before high Heaven, Miles, I can't for the life of me make it seem true! I never—"

"Of course you never harmed the poor fellow, and all we've got to do is to show the rest of the world what is so clear to our eyes. And that's just what I've sworn to do, pardner!"

"Then—so much was truth?" hesitatingly asked the prisoner, his flush of pleasure fading into a sickly pallor. "Preston—he was—killed?"

Miles Honeyman hesitated, but only for a moment or two.

Clifford Carpenter had suffered far more intensely than he had expected, but, after all, the bald truth would be best, since the actual facts could not long be withheld from his knowledge.

"What's the matter with asking me to take a seat, pardner?" he said, in briskly humorous tones, moving toward the cot and sinking down upon it, drawing the prisoner to his side by the hands which he still

clasped so cordially. "If you only knew how preciously leg-weary a lazy man can get through— Why, old rocks, just imagine!"

"I forgot to go to bed last night, and I've been hoofing it hither and yon ever since! And all on your account, you rascal, you!"

The Plunger forced a smile, but it was very wan, and a poor excuse for such mirth as he was wont to show. Then he muttered, gloomily:

"I suppose I'd ought to thank you, Miles; but—is it worth while? I'm too deep in the bog, and so—keep on dry land, you!"

"Where I'll have you before this new week's fairly spent, my pretty lad!" cheerily asserted the Sporting Detective; then changing his tone and manner for one more purely business like, he added:

"You want to get a brace on, Carpenter, and to help you— Business in a minute, now! And first, let me tell you just this: though I know you never had part nor lot in the taking off of poor Mayo Preston, fate or unseen enemies seem determined to prove that you did do him up!"

"I never—before high Heaven I never even saw him after you hustled him off, yesterday, at the track, Honeyman!"

"I could have taken my oath to that effect, old man, but—did you write to him, though?"

"Did I?—why should I write to him, pray?" almost irritably exploded the Plunger, frowning more like his usual self.

The Sporting Detective drew in a long breath, and his face certainly brightened in a degree at that quick response.

"I'll tell you why, later on pardner. And now we'll settle down to business without any further flourishes, Cliff."

"Of course I'd take a hand in, even without any other reason than that a particular crony of mine bade fair to come to grief, but it's never a bit the less true that I have still other reasons for probing this death of Mayo Preston to the bottom depths!"

"Then you suspect—whom do you think guilty, Miles?"

"Certainly not Clifford Carpenter, which ought to content you for the present; but let's get ahead, please! And now I'll tell you just what sort of circumstantial evidence we've got to buck against."

"Mayo Preston was done to death, night before last, out at Forest Park, where he was discovered pretty early in the morning, stone-cold, with a 38-caliber bullet buried in his brain!"

Carpenter gave a start at this, catching his breath while a faint tinge of color came back to his usually florid face.

"Why murder, instead of suicide, then? I know poor Preston had been plunging wildly on Dixie, and that's why he struck me: her losing!"

The Sporting Detective shook his head gravely as he made answer:

"I thought of all that, too, but it can't be read after so easy and so smooth a fashion, worse luck! For one thing, there was no powder-burns such as are sure to follow a shot fired by oneself. And—the bullet entered from the rear: he was shot from behind his back, poor devil!"

Carpenter gave a short, fierce cry at these words, springing to his feet with tightly-clenched hands, his face flushing redly, his eyes all aglow as he sternly uttered:

"A coward's deed! And they dare accuse me—me!—of such a cursedly craven deed as that?"

"Which makes it all the easier for us to disprove, don't you see, man, dear?" soothingly spoke the Sporting Detective, playing his part admirably; for no man living could better appreciate the gravity of the evidence, all of which seemed to point out Clifford Carpenter as the midnight assassin.

The prisoner sunk heavily down upon his cot, crouching there with face hidden by his joined palms; and without making any immediate attempt to rouse him again, Miles Honeyman spoke on in low but painfully distinct tones.

He went on to detail how the corpse was discovered, according to the report handed in at Police Headquarters, then spoke of a note being found upon the body when searched, which note bore the name of Clifford Carpenter!

At this the Plunger lifted his head quickly, ejaculating:

"I never wrote Preston a note in my life, man! Why should I? We could never hit it off together, even while he was backing my stable. I never—it's a rank forgery if it bears my name for signature!"

The Sporting Detective nodded assent, but there was a certain uncomfortable grimness in his tones as he spoke again:

"That's pretty much what I thought when I heard of it first, but—saying so isn't proving it, worse luck!"

"I'll swear it on my oath, then!"

"Of course, if matters ever go so far. But—I'd lie if I was to make light of it, Carpenter. Either it's a bit of the devil's own crooked luck, or else some one, or more than one person, is trying terribly hard to rush you up-river, or—send you over the trap door!"

Carpenter was more than ordinarily brave, but he could not avoid shuddering at this thinly-disguised speech, and Honeyman hurriedly added:

"It sounds like a cur snarling at a crippled lion, old fellow, but I really think it's best to tell you just how black matters look for you on the surface. Then—we'll buckle down to work and split the dirty combination wide open!"

The accused said nothing, and after a brief pause Honeyman went on:

"I've managed to get a fair squint at that note, Carpenter, and I'm forced to admit that it is a mighty good imitation of your rather peculiar fist; I'd accept it on the back of a note, for big money, without even a shade of a doubt!"

"I never wrote it, though. What does it say?"

"Well, mighty little like love-making, old man, for an ugly fact! It might be construed into a challenge to fight a duel, if all that wasn't quite out of date. And then—no seconds, no surgeons, no report after the battle! And—the wound lying at the back of his head, too!"

"It all points to murder, but I had no hand in it, Honeyman," said the accused, now looking more like his usual self, meeting that grave if friendly gaze without a shade of reluctance or of flinching. "I never harmed Mayo Preston, but I might well have done so, only for your prompt interposition, back yonder."

"I know; and that would have been all right, seeing how he assaulted you. But this—that's a horse of quite another color, Cliff!"

"You surely can't think I did it, Mr. Honeyman?"

"I know you didn't, but I'm neither judge nor jury, worse luck! And the main trouble will be to make them look at it with the eyes of white men, don't you see?"

"When do they say the deed was done?"

"That they haven't decided, as yet, if they ever can. Between dark and light, of course, but as to an hour or two—that's beyond their powers, I take it."

"And I can only account for my time up to midnight, other than by making oath I went to bed and slept until broad daylight!" muttered the captive Plunger, gloomily.

Honeyman frowned a bit at this admission, for he had hoped for a different statement; but he concealed his uneasiness as few other men could have done, and presently said:

"There's only the one thing perfectly clear, so far, Carpenter, and that is this: 'tis a case of bloody murder, and that for some reason other than plunder, since the poor fellow still wore his diamond studs, his ring, and a valuable watch and chain!"

"Another thing looks pretty clear to my eyes, and that is this: Mayo Preston was murdered by some person or persons who think the crime can be fastened upon your shoulders! Now—what enemy have you bold and bitter enough to lay such a black trap, much less spring it, Cliff?"

The prisoner was listening intently enough now, but at this he slowly shook his head, then made answer:

"I can't think of any such enemy, Miles; for the life of me I can't imagine who would do such a foul deed!"

Another brief silence fell over the friends, during which both seemed brooding over that black enigma. Then, with a half-covert look at his companion through his

bent brows, the Sporting Detective broke the silence, slowly asking:

"How about the fair young widow, Carpenter?"

"I don't—whom do you mean by that?"

"The Queen of the Turf, of course! Mrs. Eloise Houghton, to give the lady her full title—ahem! What sort of terms are you on with her, if it isn't asking too much, Carpenter?"

"What terms?" echoed the accused, like one fairly puzzled.

"Isn't it plain enough English, then, my boy? What terms? Shall I spell the word for you then?"

Clifford Carpenter flushed a bit, but that might have been at the half-jeering tone of that last query. Then he curtly asked, in turn:

"Your reasons, please? What has Mrs. Houghton to do with this ugly affair, pray?"

"First, for information. Second, that's just what I'm bent on finding out," came the blunt retort. "Will you answer me, please?"

"We are on fairly friendly terms, but nothing more than that."

"You are dead sure of all that, pardner? You can honestly assure me that you never stung her to the quick? Say—by declining or rejecting her love, for instance?" persisted the Sporting Detective, leaning forward and no longer trying to mask his intense earnestness.

Carpenter gave a short, half-laugh at this, but quickly resumed his gravity as he saw no answering smile come to that strong face opposite.

"I never had the chance to sting her pride like that, Honeyman. She and I are on fairly friendly terms. We bet together, and she wins twice where she loses once. And—what are you trying to get through you anyway, man alive?"

"I'm seeking for more light, for one thing," slowly answered the detective, stroking his blond mustaches the while. "And now I'll give you a bit of a wrinkle, pardner!"

"Mrs. Houghton was the one who first discovered that body, and she paid the policeman a big wad of the 'long green' to have her name kept out of his report; but—well, that's for lawyers to say, after you post them as I've posted you, old friend!"

And Miles Honeyman rose to his feet as if to take his leave.

#### CHAPTER IX.

##### BEFORE THE BAR OF JUSTICE.

THAT was merely a bit of play on the part of the Sporting Detective, however, mainly intended to more fully arouse the dulled wits of his friend, the prisoner.

Then, satisfied with the eye-opener he had already administered, Miles Honeyman resumed his seat, speaking rapidly, earnestly, laying bare all the points of interest he had gleaned since last parting from the Plunger at the prison door.

He said quite sufficient to thoroughly rouse the accused, and more than enough to make Carpenter realize that he had something even worse to dread than the mere disgrace of passing a night behind the bars.

Then, promising to either send or to fetch the lawyer nominated by the Plunger, Miles Honeyman took his departure, moving and looking just as brisk and wide-awake as though he had spent his last night between the sheets in place of "hustling" on behalf of his helpless friend.

Once more left alone, Clifford Carpenter resumed his dejected attitude upon the cot, chin supported by his joined hands, eyes staring at vacancy as he pondered gloomily over the situation, hardly brightened by this friendly call.

Was it possible that this brutal murder had been committed solely in order to ruin him? Had Mayo Preston been done to death as the surest method of destroying another—and that other himself?

Even now that bare idea seemed incredible. In this humdrum, matter-of-fact world, who would be so recklessly sensational? In days gone by, perhaps, but surely not now!

So Clifford Carpenter assured himself, over and over; yet, in spite of that stubborn skepticism, the naked, cruel facts would obtrude themselves, and once again the grave,

earnest tones of Miles Honeyman seemed to ring in his ears, summing up the proofs which could not be denied.

He had not harmed Mayo Preston, nor had he written to him; yet upon that dead body was found a note signed by his name, apparently in his own peculiar handwriting; and that note was seemingly a lure through which the ruined gambler had been decoyed to Forest Park, there to meet his fate after such a cruel fashion!

"Who did it, then, since God knows I'm innocent as the unborn babe?" the accused asked himself just as often as those ugly facts forced themselves upon his notice.

It could not have been done in the first heat of mad passion, else that forged note would not have been found upon the corpse.

The deed surely must have been coolly, deliberately, carefully planned from first detail to the last!

"By whom? Who would try to blast my good name as well as condemn me to the gallows? Could it be that—"

Again the earnest tones of the Sporting Detective seemed to make answer, and then the accused slowly forced his past year or two in review, dwelling longest upon those incidents in which Eloise Houghton and Farquhar had figured more or less prominently.

True, there had never been anything between the dashing young widow and himself which savored of aught stronger than a harmless flirtation, just such as any man and woman might indulge in, merely to help kill time, since their tastes and pursuits seemed so nearly alike.

But—how many unexpected losses had he met with, during the past year, including this latest race which had been lost after being fairly won? And in all of these losses, he now saw it was possible the brilliant "Queen of the Turf" might have figured to his detriment, to her own clear profit.

"And Farquhar? That cold-blooded scoundrel I never swallowed all those nasty hints and vague rumors about her connection with him, but now—if true, wouldn't that account for Jockey Jap? Did they buy him up, to throw me over? Did they bribe—But what's all that got to do with poor Preston, you dunderhead?"

Right there lay the one puzzle which none of his efforts could solve, and no matter how widely his thoughts might range, they were sure to fetch him around to that red mystery at last.

And Clifford Carpenter was still brooding over his unfortunate situation when he was once more roused up by the opening of his cell door, this time to give admission to his lawyer, a brisk-moving, glib-tongued man of middle age who had won for himself a solid reputation as a "winning lawyer."

Theron Carew was not accompanied by Miles Honeyman, because that gentleman had other duties which he deemed more important, just then, as the lawyer briefly explained to his client after reading aright the look of disappointment which Carpenter flashed past him at the closing door of his cell.

"But he posted me pretty thoroughly before shooting off at a tangent, my dear sir," briskly added Carew, placing hat on floor and drawing the stool more in front of the cot where his client was sitting. "And what he did not or could not tell, I'll pick up from your lips, of course. So—shall we get down to business, my dear sir?"

Thanks to the repeated shocks administered by the Sporting Detective, the Plunger's nerves had grown a bit less sensitive, else he could never have endured the swift probing of that keen-edged tongue, and Theron Carew might have taken away from the jail far more than he brought to it.

But by this time the Plunger had grown cool enough to realize that he sorely needed just such aid and assistance as the busy law-sharp best knew how to afford, and meekly submitted to that far from pleasant ordeal.

But on one point he was stubbornly set, and no words or arguments offered by his lawyer could shake his will in the slightest.

"I want it over with as quickly as possible you understand, Carew?" Carpenter said, almost at the beginning of that consultation. "There must be no delay on our part. If this wasn't Sunday, I'd have my examination over by this time!"

To this the Plunger stuck, and as he flatly declined to listen to aught else until such a pledge had been given him, Theron Carew promised to have his preliminary examination come off on the morrow, if possible.

"That's cutting our cloth mighty brief, sir," commented the lawyer with a smile which could hardly be termed one of unalloyed satisfaction. "It's got only one redeeming quality, so far as I can see just now: the other side will be taken even more by surprise than I am!"

After that the lawyer fell to work with redoubled eagerness, and in a marvelously brief space of time had extracted every item which he thought could possibly cast any light upon that dark subject.

Fortunately for the wishes of the prisoner, court was then in session, and with one so energetic as Theron Carew to "push things," it was not such a difficult matter as may be supposed.

It was quite out of the question to have the preliminary examination on the morrow, of course, but Carew came as near that date as possible, and lost no time in carrying the news to his client.

"It's set for Tuesday at ten A. M.," was his brisk report as he secured admission to his client. "Still, my dear sir, it isn't too late for acting sensibly, so—let me waive examination and apply for—"

But Clifford Carpenter cut him short, flatly refusing even to listen to the arguments which had already been brought to bear, then as now in vain.

"It's not law I'm after, Carew, but simple justice," he sternly declared. "I'm as innocent of this dirty crime as you can be, and why should I fear to say so, or to stand by my record?"

So it was finally settled, and though the Plunger felt that each day and night spent behind those bars added more than a year to his age, he tried to live in hopes of leaving that jail for the court-room, never again to return to either as a prisoner!

Strangely enough as he felt it, Miles Honeyman had never returned since going forth in quest of the Plunger's lawyer; and when questioned as to his whereabouts, Theron Carew could only shake his head and declare his utter ignorance.

Tuesday came at length, and Clifford Carpenter was conducted to the court-room, where very few spectators had gathered at that comparatively early hour, for the fact that such a hearing had been agreed upon was kept a secret as far as possible.

The accused, his cheeks flushed deeply red with humiliated pride at being forced to fill such an unwonted *role*, looked neither to the right nor the left as he entered the room in charge; but as by instinct he knew that Miles Honeyman was present, and when he stole a look in that direction, he saw with sinking heart that the smile which greeted his eyes was surely forced for the occasion.

If the Sporting Detective had lost faith, what hope was left him?

Standing rigidly erect through all, Clifford Carpenter listened to what went on about him, more like one in a dream than a man who stood before the bar of justice charged with a crime which surely meant death upon the gallows if unproved!

Like one in a dream he heard the prosecuting attorney tersely recite the facts which he expected to prove; the quarrel between the two men, the finding of a signed note upon the body, the nature of the wound, which surely barred the plea of suicide; all this, with much more which made an even less distinct impression upon his dazed mind, just then.

The brief argument submitted by Theron Carew made even less impression on his mind, but when the grave, stern-featured judge began putting crisp questions directly to himself, the prisoner roused up and for the first time since entering that enclosure looked something like his usual self.

In answer to those questions, Carpenter briefly told how he had been assaulted by the deceased at the race-course, and why, so far as he could make out.

He gave a record of his movements after that affair, up to midnight, when he retired as usual, sleeping without a break until broad daylight.

He had not laid eyes on Mayo Preston after that gentleman was hurried away by

Miles Honeyman. He had never in his life written note or letter to the deceased; he said this upon his oath before high Heaven!

"You went to bed at twelve, and rose at eight o'clock the next morning, you say, Mr. Carpenter?" repeated the judge, slowly. "Was it possible for you to leave bed and room for the street, without rousing the house?"

Carpenter flushed hotly at that question, but forced himself to make calm answer:

"It was possible, sir, of course, as all who room in a hotel know; but I swear that I never left my room that night!"

"You can prove this, then?"

The prisoner shook his head in negation before replying:

"Only by my word of honor, sir. I room alone, and never so much as dreaming of aught like this—Why should I, then?" with a fierce outbreak of insulted honor. "Am I a man to work such an infernally foul deed as this? Do I make a practice of striking my enemies from the rear, and under cover of darkness? If so—if I had meant any such thing—if I had sent Preston a challenge like that, sir, wouldn't I have covered up my tracks by providing just such proof as you now ask for?"

Before more could be said, there came a sudden bustle at the other end of the room, and rushing toward the bar a young woman flung up a restraining hand and almost shrilly cried aloud:

"Oh, am I too late? He is not guilty! I saw the poor man shot, and this gentleman never did it—I swear that in the face of Heaven!"

## CHAPTER X.

### PUTTING ON THEIR ARMOR.

AMONG the many who felt an almost feverish interest in the Preston-Carpenter case, should be numbered Eloise Houghton and Ulrich Farquhar.

Without openly stirring in the matter, which might prove dangerous through turning interest or curiosity their way, the allies had kept fairly well posted as to all developments, although they had no certain means of knowing that Miles Honeyman was drawing so dangerously nigh to the real authorship of that dastardly crime.

Before high noon of Monday Adonis Farquhar knew that the Plunger was to have his preliminary examination on Tuesday, and shortly after the shades of evening began falling over the smoky City of Mounds, he entered the residence of the Queen of the Turf, and cut precious little time to waste in broaching the all-important subject.

Their skies were far from being all sunny, too!

Neither schemer was in an angelic mood, and as is pretty certain to prove the case under such circumstances, recriminations were far more plentiful than compliments.

Still, the situation was critical enough to make them realize the necessity of "pulling together" lest worse should come, and barring those brief spats and clawings, the couple were fairly well agreed.

Among the earliest points of angry debate came that anonymous note which the widow had found while examining the pocketbook of the dead man, and she was the one to bring up the subject.

"I was almost certain of it at first glimpse, but now I've made dead sure who wrote it, Adonis!"

"Whom do you accuse now?" with an undisguised sneer in voice as upon features. "Any fresh wrinkle, just to make it more binding?"

"Don't you try to up-nose, now, unless you want something of your boasted beau—" lacking, Ulrich Farquhar!" harshly retorted the woman, one hand rising in a cat-like manner, with claws ready for action. "Is this a time for spitting and sparring? Don't you know that—the devil was at your elbow when you pulled trigger that black night!"

"Maybe so, Queen, but—his consort is before my eyes right now, and I'm not so mighty sure which I'd rather have for a comrade, either!" lazily drawled the adventurer, but with an ugly fire smoldering in his big blue eyes the while.

"Better Persephone than Jack Ketch, surely, Adonis?" the woman reported with one of her most brilliant smiles; then leaning a bit more forward as she earnestly spoke on:

"Surely we can't afford to quarrel seriously, just now, Ulrich? This bids fair to prove one of the nastiest tangles our feet have ever got caught up in, and—will you hear me out, decently, then?"

"Why wouldn't I, Queen? This mare's nest of yours is—of just what breed, pray?"

"Claudine Vaughn wrote that note, and I felt it in my very soul the first glimpse I caught of it!"

"How can you be so positive, Queen? The hand looked thoroughly disguised, and I couldn't make anything out of it."

"Disguised, yes! But when a woman with blood as hot as that cat holds, gets down to writing to a man she wants to slobber all over—ugh! It makes me sick to think of it!"

"Then why keep on brooding over what you admit can't be mended?"

"Are you all fool, Ulrich Farquhar?" harshly demanded the widow, her eyes aglow, her red lips curling in fierce impatience. "Can't you even begin to see, man alive?"

"What more is there to see?"

"What if Claudine Vaughn comes forward and speaks of that note? How if she tells what that note contained, before judge and jury? Shall I show it to you again? Have you so soon forgotten what it contains, what name it gives in connection with the Druid's Oak?"

Farquhar no longer kept up that pretense of indifference, but, letting the mask fall, he showed his white teeth in a vicious snarl.

Eloise Houghton gave a swift nod at that, then added:

"Say an inkling should leak out, through her lips or from some other source: wouldn't that fact turn suspicion hotly our way, Adonis?"

"Yes, but how can we help that? How dare we take any steps toward corking her up? Better let a sleeping dog lie, Queen!"

"If she don't wake up of her own accord, though!"

"She's too proud for that, I believe, Queen. She would have to explain just how she knew of such a note. She would be questioned until the whole truth came out, and her crazy jealousy laid bare to become the jest and laughing-stock of every pair of idle lips in town."

Eloise Houghton shook her head, slowly.

"As you say, the spiteful cat is fairly crazed through jealousy, and of me! So—she has mighty little character to lose at the best, and if she thinks she can fix this job on me—good-by John!"

"She's a woman, therefore a fool!" coarsely declared the adventurer, with an ugly sneer. "And—you're another, Queen!"

"What! Do you dare call me fool, Ulrich Farquhar?"

"I said another—woman, my dear," with a profound bow which by no means lessened the sting of his meaning. "And you couldn't let matters rest as they were, since you were a woman!"

"What is it you really mean, sir?"

"That it is an infernally ugly case, look at it in whatever light you may, Queen," more placably uttered her confederate. "Still, it would have been far less complicated if you hadn't been so brash; think of it all, will you? You the one to discover the body?"

"And you the one to make the corpse, Ulrich Farquhar!"

Harshly came the first sentence, and fiercely came the retort. Woman faced man with tightly clinched hands, with eyes glittering wickedly, and her entire person quiver with fight.

Ulrich Farquhar saw this, and realized that he was going beyond the bounds of prudence, so he abruptly altered both tone and manner, leaning forward to lay a cool hand upon that rigid arm the heat of which seemed to scorch his fingers; then he spoke in grave tones:

"Once for all, Queenie, let's drop these profitless recriminations. You and I can't afford to quarrel, old girl! We've run in double harness too long for either to make a record in single gear, so—up with the flag of truce, Eloise!"

"I'd never thought of hauling it down, only for your infernally provoking ways, Adonis," came the softer reply as her tense muscles relaxed and she drew a long breath as of relief.

"That's only on the surface, Queenie, as you surely ought to know by this time, I can't well help it when matters turn crooked; and I can only let the mask fall while alone with you, old lady!"

"You'll let it fall just once too often, I'm afraid, Adonis, although I try to make full allowance for your sour nature. But let that flea stick by the wall!"

"Gladly, my Queen! We need all our powers now to fight off dangerous suspicion, and can't afford to waste any strength in quarreling in our own family. So—what about the girl, Eloise?"

The woman gave a sharp gesture, her jetty brows contracting in anything but an angelic mood. And the hollowness of that patched-up truce was made evident by the acidity of her tones as she broke forth anew:

"That's another one of your brilliant strokes of genius, Ulrich Farquhar! Didn't I say from the very first that your wild fancy was perfectly preposterous?"

"And your say-so is law and gospel, of course!"

"It was solid sense, and that's enough better, my pretty lad!" retorted the widow, with sly readiness. "Weren't we plucking the fat pigeon rapidly enough as matters stood? Why mix up in such an awkward affair, anyway? Surely we had as near a dead open-and-shut as any reasonable person could wish for?"

More than once during this swift torrent of words Ulrich Farquhar opened his lips to make reply or retort, but the widow was not to be cheated out of her first say, and easily bluffed him off until she was ready for a brief breathing spell.

Then the man sullenly spoke out in gruff tones:

"It's like you to kick, and to keep on kicking, Queen? You can talk a blue streak now, but tell me this: weren't you the one to first hunt up this Gerva Gale? Tell me that, now!"

"Simply because you weren't half smart enough to turn the trick by your lonesome, Adonis!" mocked the fair widow, showing her teeth anew.

"Didn't you propose it, though, Queen?"

"Certainly, but any fool would have known I was hardly half-way in earnest about it when I did so," asserted Eloise.

That thin lip curled and a dogged expression settled over the man's face as he spoke in more even tones:

"Well, I'm not ashamed to admit the naked truth if you are, and so I say just this: I went into the job in sober earnest, and now I'm even more desperately resolved to win both trick and game!"

"Why not wait until we see just how Cliff Carpenter comes out of his scrape, though Adonis?"

"Because it might then be too late, as no one ought to know better than yourself, Eloise Houghton! If the Vaughn should take the stand—"

"What proof can she show to back up her words, since no other living eyes but ours have ever seen that note?"

"But her making the charge might cause that officer to blow the gaff, in spite of your paying for a silent tongue. I'm not so mighty sure you didn't make a false step right then and there, Queen!"

"Nor am I, Adonis," came the frank admission. "Still, think how sudden it all was, and how little time I had granted me for thought! I did what I believed was for our best interests, then, and growling comes with poor grace from your lips, Ulrich!"

"That's a center-shot, Queen, and I'll try to cork it up, from now on," said Farquhar with fair grace as his white hand came forth to meet her warmer palm with a close grasp. "We're riding the waves in the same leaky boat, old lady, and if one sinks the other can't swim ashore!"

"If you were always like this, Adonis, we could beat the whole world without half trying!" exclaimed the fair young widow, with growing emotion visible in face as perceptible in her tones.

"I wouldn't give a fig of odds to the world alone, Queenie," said her accomplice, with a

low, grim chuckle; "but there's the hangman and the foul fiend additional! Long odds, my pretty!"

"Long odds, my lad, but we've beaten 'em up to date, and I reckon we can keep up that same winning gait until we're safely under the wire!"

"After which we'll turn pious, get religion, build a church and endow a theological collegel" mockingly added the red-handed, as he rose to his feet and settled his garments like one who is on the point of taking his departure.

"About the girl, Queen: as I told you a bit ago, I'm in deadly earnest, now! I mean to carry out our scheme just as we planned it at the start."

"You mean to force her into marrying you, Ulrich?"

"Just that, Eloise!" with a swift, sidelong glance at her paling face for the moment. "I'll never let up until Gerva Gale is my lawfully-wedded wife, and then— You can guess the rest, surely, Queenie?"

"May the hand of the hangman spare you all further trouble on his account, then, Adonis! Now—whither bound, pray?"

"Out of town, to see that all is going well under the kindly roof of Mother Godfrey, to be sure, my sweetness! Now—ta-ta!"

## CHAPTER XI.

### MOTHER GODFREY AND HER GUEST.

MEANWHILE Gerva Gale was having anything but a blissful experience under the mossy roof of that old and weather-beaten house where Mother Godfrey reigned supreme.

Ulrich Farquhar had spoken sooth when he asserted that the girl would not be very much longer in rallying from the drug which he had employed as a quieting, and while a more pleasant, good-natured young lady never drew the breath of life than was Gerva Gale under ordinary circumstances, these in which she now found herself certainly justified a departure from that gentle and submissive role.

What with tears and pleadings, threats and denunciation, Mother Godfrey very quickly began to realize that her office of guardian was not likely to prove an empty sinecure.

Born cross and crabbed, a long life of adversity combined with lawless practices had by no means tended to render the old lady more angelic, and thanks in part to her getting very little sleep that storm-brewing night, Mother Godfrey was particularly out of sorts through the holy Sabbath day.

There was a bit of canting twang to her tones for the most part, which might have been accounted for by a suspicious odor of strong waters whenever she stumbled into the chamber to which the maiden had been confined ever since the departure of Ulrich Farquhar; and even before the meridian the old hag brought tears to her own eyes, even as they made themselves heard in her husky voice.

"The bitter black curse of neglected duty be upon your head, ye troublesome baggage!" she would burst forth, dabbing an eye with the doubled corner of her none too clean apron as she shook her other hand at the captive maiden. "The blessed Sabbath day, and you hindering me from helping to keep it holy!"

"Open the door and let me go, then!" impulsively cried Gerva, still clinging to the hope which one less sanguine by nature must long since have abandoned. "Is it my fault that—"

"Your fault? Of course it's your fault, ye pesky imp—ye uncropped limb of Satan!" broke in the hag in angered tones, dropping apron to have a brace of hands for shaking at the girl. "Ain't you keeping me 'way from church? Ain't I bound down here by the need of— And me one of the blessed Sunday-school teachers, too—huh! huh! huh!"

That whimper broadened into a veritable flood of tears, but through it all Mother Godfrey kept at least one eye clear enough to make sure her charge did not plunge her into fresh trouble by breaking away, or by stealing off under cover of her lachrymose lamentations.

Gerva Gale tried all she knew to escape from her prison, but in vain.

The chamber to which Mother Godfrey limited her was in the second story of the building, and though that was old and time-worn, there were no weak or neglected points of which the maiden could take advantage.

The two windows which that room contained were both closely shuttered, and each sash was firmly fastened down. Gerva vainly strove to open one or the other, if only to win a little better light, or to gain a better idea of her prison-place by viewing its surroundings.

Mother Godfrey never entered or left the chamber without locking the door behind her, and as that long Sabbath day passed without bringing even a single ray of hope to the poor girl, though her repulsive jailer seemed to fall further and further under the influence of liquor as the hours crept along, despair took possession of her, and Gerva fairly sobbed herself to sleep before the coming of midnight.

Monday proved to be but a duplicate of the other days, save that Mother Godfrey was just a little bit more intoxicated when she brought Gerva breakfast than she had been when she uttered a maudlin good-night the evening before.

Evidently it was "the same old drunk," however, and Mother Godfrey still remembered her caution, putting down tray and pitcher to stand on her guard while re-locking the door through which she came, and using the same precautions when beating her retreat.

She was just a trifle more maudlin, more lachrymose o-day than yesterday, and gave a rehash of her grievous wrongs in being deprived of her religious exercises.

"And it's not so much me as 'tis them, blessed darlings!" she snuffled, by way of varying her moans. "What am I, but a poor, crawling, sinful, miserable worm i' the dust! What matter if my degraded soul be lost and tossed into outer darkness, and—all that? What matter, I'm asking ye, limb of Satan? Just so those blessed angels ain't cheated out of the bread of life forever such as I mete out unto them—when— Huh! you dare to snicker, girl, and I'll claw your fool' eyes out, so I will!"

This proved to be but the beginning of a change which promised to end in something worse and more outrageous than revilings alone, for at her next visit to the prison-chamber Mother Godfrey brought with her a long, pliant blacksnake whip, the oiled lash of which she drew lovingly through her hands while mumbling threats which whisky made almost inarticulate.

That awful strain was beginning to tell severely upon the maiden, and she shuddered as she found her bodily strength beginning to lessen just when she felt she might need it all.

She tried softer tones now, and stooped to coax and almost pray to that drunken old hag, hoping even against hope to thus melt her conscience sufficiently far to open door and remove bar; but as the shades of another night fell over the earth, Gerva Gale knew she ought to expect nothing from that wicked old witch.

Mother Godfrey was later than usual in coming up for the supper-tray that night, and when she did put in an appearance, her skinny right hand was gripping the polished butt of the blacksnake, and her other hand nervously coiled and twisted the long round lash.

"Spare the rod and spoil the child! Spare the rod—I should say lash! Spare the r-lash, and—and all that!" she mumbled, crouching a bit and moving toward the wide-eyed maiden with shuffling, side-long steps, her thin lips curling away from those yellowed fangs which alone remained to remind Mother Godfrey of the teeth she had possessed in years long gone by.

"What do you mean, woman?" cried Gerva, springing to her feet with a return of her usual energy.

"Huh! huh! mean—call me mean, do ye, limb of Satan? Call me out o' my legal name, will ye? Call me—I'd ought to spare—I mean I didn't ought to spoil the rod by sparing the child! And—mean is it?"

Mother Godfrey made a nervous gesture with her skinny right hand, letting the lash

slip through her other fingers to fly out in the direction of the girl at bay, ending with a vicious snap.

Swift as thought Gerva caught the lash and took a turn of the pliant leather around her hand; but then, forcing a winning smile, she stepped forward, holding out her other hand as she spoke:

"Surely you would not harm me, Mother Godfrey? Is it my fault that you are put to all this trouble? Surely you know how gladly I would relieve you of all care on my account, if only you will—oh, if you are indeed a woman! If you have a heart that can feel for a poor, friendless orphan, spare me!"

Dropping the lash, Gerva sunk to her knees upon that soiled floor, hands clasping and lifted up as second to her appeal.

Once again the poor girl was trying that hopeless task; trying to touch a heart which had long since hardened and turned to stone.

Mother Godfrey recoiled a bit at first, for it seemed as though the prisoner was about to show fight; but then she grinned and mowed, working her lantern jaws as though chewing a delicious cud, batting her red and bleared eyes with an owlish wag of her frowsy head.

Gerva ceased, for her voice broke and grew too husky for articulate speech, and Mother Godfrey cackled like an old hen, then cried out:

"Go on, deary! Do it some more! Beg and plead—pray to me, ye evil limb of Satan! Kneel and grovel until the sore bones come through your pampered flesh, imp of depravity! Ah-huh! Beg—beg—beg!"

With whining gentleness came the first words, but that lasted barely long enough for notice; then her tones hardened and grew rasping, her leather-like lips tinging with froth and each word brought forth a tiny spray, not wholly unlike that of a rage-spitting cat.

The maiden recoiled, as well she might, for just then Mother Godfrey looked far more demon than human; and again came an abrupt change on the old hag's part.

Swinging the black snake behind her with drunken craftiness, she held out her free hand, coaxingly saying:

"Come, now, honey-bird! Come, now, my sweetness! Surely you wouldn't get frightened at your own Mammy Godfrey, then? Surely ye wouldn't—and me loving ye harder'n a mule kin kick down hill, too!"

"Then why do you keep me here a prisoner?" impulsively cried the maiden, feeling how worse than useless was all pleading, yet irresistibly forced to grasp at so frail a chance. "Let me go free, and I'll pay you all you can ask, even though I have to slave for years to gather up the money! Let me go before that awful man—"

"Careful, ye silly fool!" croakingly cut in Mother Godfrey at that point. "Who's awful? Surely not—not the honorable gentleman who means to make a perfect lady of you? Surely not Mr.—surely not the kind and high-toned gentleman, deary?"

"Who is he? Who is this gentleman—pah!" with a swift gesture of angry scorn. "Who is this—this person, then?"

Mother Godfrey chuckled like one who sees a fair chance to add to her merit as a valuable employee, and briskly made an answer:

"Who is he, deary? Why not ask him, my lump of sweetness? Huh huh! Why not ask him when he comes to court—he! he!—comes to court his lady fair! And that's you, my deary! That's you, unless—why don't you bow and courtesy and crook the knee, ye limb of Satan? Surely ye ought, for isn't he—ha! ha!—isn't he, though!"

"Who is he, then? And why has he so cruelly torn me from all my friends, to drag me here, where only you—"

"Who is he, eh? Maybe a lord—maybe a prince—maybe the devil himself, deary!" chuckled the hag dancing clumsily before her prisoner the while. "And then you'd reign as Queen of the Infernal Regions, and he would be—"

"I know—I saw it all!" cried Gerva, unable longer to hold back her friend again. "You refuse to tell me, but I know—he is a cold-blooded as a—"

Mother Godfrey recoiled from the crimson

fierce words, but not for long. Her own passions had grown doubly vicious through being so long held in check, and now that a fair excuse seemed to offer itself, she was only too ready to grasp the opportunity.

"Huh-ha! Is that the tune ye'd pipe, my little cat?" she snarlingly cried, no longer trying to conceal that cruel weapon. "Is that the way ye'd try to slander the nice gentleman who runs so much trouble on your silly account? Is that— Ah-huh! I see the devil in your eyes big's a bushel-basket, and—whip it out—whip it out!"

With a vicious snarl at each broken sentence Mother Godfrey swung her lash around, striking swift and sure, with all the art of a trained hand at the business.

With a cry of indignant pain Gerva Gale recoiled, flinching and shuddering as that cruel lash bit through her thin garments, each blow leaving its mark, so savage was that assault.

"Whip it out! Whip it out!" the hag croaked as she swung the lash.

## CHAPTER XII.

### MORE SURPRISES THAN ONE.

In spite of all that had gone before, Gerva Gale was taken by surprise when Mother Godfrey first swung that ugly weapon in vicious earnest, for she could not credit even her with such an outrage.

Recoiling with an involuntary cry of angry pain, the maiden at first only thought of saving her face and neck from being scarred by that vicious lash, shrinking away until the rear wall checked her further retreat, while Mother Godfrey followed her up, now fairly screeching with savage joy as she showered those wicked blows faster and heavier.

But then Gerva was stung into acting on the offensive, and crying out sharply as a more stinging stroke brought a tinge of blood through her tightly-drawn sleeve, she caught at that lash, and giving it a quick jerk, at the same time sprung upward and forward, striking fairly against the breast of that drunken hag.

The unexpected shock partially destroyed Mother Godfrey's balance, and as the now thoroughly aroused girl pressed the fight, striking and pushing with blind but effectual fury, the old witch staggered to a fall, her head coming in forcible contact with a sharp corner of the molding where it passed around the projecting chimney, just above the floor.

To that fall was added the weight of Gerva herself, although that part was wholly involuntary, and the maiden thought only of saving herself as the downfall came.

Still, she felt the shock quite forcibly, and drew back in trembling dizziness, panting for breath and for the moment giving no thought to improving the advantage she had so far won.

But Mother Godfrey still lay as she had fallen, her mouth open, her lower jaw drooping, her eyes turned back in their sockets after a gruesome fashion, while from the roots of her nearly white hair Gerva now saw the red blood trickling freely!

She shrunk further away, with a gasp of dread and horror commingled, but then, like a flash of light a ray of the glad truth came to her

What was to hinder her escape now?

The maiden sprung to her feet with a choking cry, and with trembling hands she strove to open the door through which her grim guardian had entered, recoiling with a low cry of despair as the barrier declined to open at her frantic efforts.

That confusion lasted not long, and Gerva turned toward Mother Godfrey, knowing now that the key must be in her pocket! and—that pocket was now beneath the woman's body!

She looked so grimly deathlike, so repulsively evil even as she lay there like a log! How could she bear to touch—what?

Gerva caught her breath sharply just then, for surely the wicked old witch was stirring!

The next instant banished all doubt, and not fearing the living nearly so much as she had the dead, Gerva Gale sprung forward

and dropped to her knees beside that figure, grasping and rolling it over, the more quickly to reach that pocket and its precious contents.

"Devil—whip it out!" huskily wheezed Mother Godfrey, one skinny paw going out with a quivering clutch of her fingers. "Spare the rod and—cat! Beg, ye imp of—huh! huh! huh!"

Gerva recoiled with a half-smothered cry of dismay, for the old witch was feebly, blindly raising her head as she mechanically groped after the whip she so fondly cherished.

But that fear did not last long, now that Gerva had fairly begun to realize how nearly she had won her freedom, and rallying all her powers for the work, the maiden broke those apron-strings, and tearing the stout coarse cloth into strips, made use of them in binding Mother Godfrey hand and foot!

Now that she seemed to see the way fairly clear for her, Gerva acted promptly and decisively enough, and though the old witch rallied with remarkable celerity from a blow which might easily have crushed in a less thick skull, she was powerless to do more than scold and curse, beg and whine as she restlessly agitated her now hampered frame.

"Ah-huh!" she croaked, chokingly, twisting her skinny neck around until her bleared eyes could catch a glimpse of that fair visage. "Ye mustn't—ye surely wouldn't murder me, deary-love?"

"Twould be nothing more than you richly deserve, Mother Godfrey!" sternly declared the maiden, now no longer the weak and trembling suppliant. "But I'll do nothing worse than—just this!"

Her hands drew tight the final knot, then one of them slipped into that dress-pocket in quest of the key to the door.

Mother Godfrey kicked and squirmed vigorously at this, evidently realizing just what that movement would lead up to; and she whined more pitifully than ever.

"Ab, my dear, lovey dovey! Surely you wouldn't be so cruel as to— It'll be my death if ye leave me so! I'll die—die like a choking cat with— Oh, deary! deary! spare me for—ah-huh! huh!"

"Don't try to make out you're all fool, Mother Godfrey!" contemptuously said Gerva, as she secured that key and drew back from further contact with that hideous old hag. "You can contrive to free yourself in a few hours if help doesn't come to you from— Oh!"

She broke off abruptly just then and sprung across the room to the door, for that broken sentence recalled the possibility of that ruthless murderer paying his tool a visit, and she could only breathe freely, now, when fairly outside of that horrible prison!

Gerva inserted the key in the lock and swiftly turned it, then drew the door partly open as she turned to give Mother Godfrey a last word.

The hag was glaring toward the maiden, and before Gerva could say what she wished, a wild, vicious screech broke from the old woman, and she fairly howled forth the words:

"Stop her, master! Don't let— Stop her, I say!"

Gerva turned on the instant, but it was too late!

Just outside that opening showed a masculine shape, whose strong arms closed about her as she strove to escape even then, by making a desperate rush through the doorway.

"Ah-huh!" croakingly cried the hag, rolling over and thumping the bare floor with her hampered heels the better to express her vindictive joy. "Hug her tight, master, dear! Squeeze her! Pinch her! Smother her with kisses which— Ah huh! It's my sort of kisses she'd ought to have, the limb of— Ah-huh—huh huh!"

"Go easy, my precious!" said the man in whose arms poor Gerva had so lucklessly sprung. "I'll handle you with care, but—come, my angel!"

He swung around with his feebly-struggling burden and passed to the head of the stairs, lightly descending to the lower level, paying not the slightest attention to the cries and croakings of Mother Godfrey who thus found herself deserted by both friend and foe.

## The Sporting Detective.

Entering a room where a lamp was burning dimly, the man kicked the door to behind them, then lowered his prize until she could feel her footing once more, but still maintaining possession so far as one half-encircling arm was concerned.

Dim though that light was, Gerva could see that a mask of some description covered that face and throat, the disguise rendered still more complete by the shadow thrown by the broad-leaved hat, the front of which was pulled down almost to the fellow's eyes.

Terrified and in despair though she was, Gerva seemed to recognize the same mysterious being who had abducted her the week before, but ere she could rally sufficiently to say or do aught, the man spoke:

"Go easy, I say, Gerva Gale! Act sensibly, and no harm shall come to you for this bit of ugly work. But if you think to play the fool—"

As he spoke the fellow stood with back toward the door which had swung to in answer to his kick, and hence he failed to see aught of that silent movement which swung the barrier wide enough for a tip-toeing shape to enter the room, then crouch for an instant like one measuring his distance and calculating his stroke!

Gerva saw, indistinctly, but her little gasp was unheeded by her captor, who doubtless confused it with her former cries and faint struggles for freedom.

Then that crouching shape sprung across the room, striking as he came, and without even a gasp or a groan, Ulrich Farquhar sunk to the floor, quivering as an ox lies under the pole-ax of the butcher.

Only that one stroke, and he who dealt it never gave his victim so much as a passing glance before closing an arm about the unsteady figure of the frightened maiden, at the same time slipping his other hand over her lips.

"Not a sound—not a cry, for your life, my dear!" he said in low, but marvelously distinct tones as he fairly lifted Gerva clear of the floor and swung around toward that now widely opened door. "I'm a true friend, and I'm going to take you straight back to your own home!"

From overhead came wild screeches and howls, mingled with oaths and curses, which surely came with ill grace from the lips of a "Sunday-school teacher," and possibly this had something to do with the haste this latest comer exhibited, just then.

However that might be, Gerva was hustled swiftly out of the house and through that straggling grove of cottonwoods to where stood a neat road-cart with a trim-built roadster between the shafts.

Into this vehicle the maiden was briskly but respectfully placed, and the stranger hurriedly spoke again:

"Just while I unhitch, ma'am, please! Then we'll be racking out for town and home quick as two pair of mighty lively heels can cover the distance! Now—so-ho, lad!"

With a strong hand sliding back along horse as well as lines, the stranger held his spirited steed in check until he could spring lightly into the cart, then laughing cheerily as the roadster started off in a long, free trot, cutting the curve with as much grace as speed, and that was giving him no slight credit, too!

All of this had taken place so rapidly that Gerva Gale had hardly time to realize just what was happening her, but now a strange mingling of fears and hopes assailed her..

Who was this man? How chanced he so opportunely upon the scene? Whither was he taking her now—and for what purpose?

As though he divined something of her thoughts, the stranger said:

"I'll tell you the whole story, miss, as soon as we get fairly into the straight road for town; but just now—this much!

"I dogged that rascal all the way from St. Louis, and expressly for the purpose of finding and freeing you! And when I heard your scream—well, I just jumped in and gave the fellow the best I kept in stock!"

"Then you are not—not—" faltered the maiden, at the same time giving a little cry as her hat flew off her head, falling over the rear end of the cart into the comparative darkness.

"Oh, sir!" she exclaimed, both hands flying up to her head, then convulsively clutching at the lines as she added: "M, I—"

Let me get out, and I will—I've dropped my hat, sir!"

The man quickly reined in the horse, at the same time speaking in almost as hurried tones:

"I'll get the hat if you think—Can you hold him in, think?"

"Oh, yes! I have often driven—Steady, boy—steady now!"

She really appeared capable of managing the horse, and the man jumped out in search of the hat; but he never found it! For the horse sped away under the lash, and back came a clear, mocking laugh from the maid!

For a brief space the man stood staring through the gloom like one dumfounded, then he broke forth with grim emphasis:

"Sold again, and sold mighty cheap, too! Think of it, will ye? Just think of Miles Honeyman, played for a sucker, gills and all!"

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### GERVA GALE BEARS WITNESS.

The impulsive address of that unsummoned witness certainly caused quite a sensation in court, and for once during a long and dignified career as such, the judge forgot to rebuke one who dared fly in the face of all rules and regulations.

The lawyers were plainly taken aback by that totally unexpected irruption, and the prisoner stood like one too intensely surprised for speech or motion.

But then Theron Carew, scenting an advantage for his client, sprung to his feet with swift audacity, crying aloud:

"Wait, miss! Beg pardon, your Honor, but this is our witness, and—er—come to the stand a little previous, your Honor, but—"

While speaking thus the foxy little lawyer hurried over to where the girl was standing, just a little abashed now as she saw all eyes turned so curiously her way; but that hand was almost angrily flung off her arm, and that warning whisper wholly unheeded.

"I don't know you, sir, and I'm here solely to tell the truth for—Oh, sir!" her hands clasping and reaching out toward the judge in further appeal. "I've told you true, sir! He—this gentleman never did that awful deed, and—May I go, now, sir?"

At the same moment Miles Honeyman slipped forward to catch Carew by an arm, drawing him back even while letting fall for his ears alone:

"Give her loose rein, pardner! She's my darling of the runaway last night, can't you see? And—let her run free, and there'll be less show for the opposition to accuse us of jockeying, don't you savvy?"

Possibly because that appeal was so earnest, so far out of the regular routine; or, maybe, partly owing to the youth and undeniable beauty of this untrained witness, for once in his life Judge Vigo forgot his rigid adherence to forms, and leaving his elevated position, actually hurried to calm the young lady with his fatherly words!

This seemed to be just what was needed most, for Gerva Gale lost that scared, apprehensive air, and grew far more collected.

Merely waiting long enough to assure himself that the young woman was a competent witness, and not one of those occasional "cranks" who are liable to "turn up" any day in court where a sensational case is being tried, Judge Vigo bade the officer in waiting provide the witness with a seat, then returned to his own position.

Although this consumed but little time, counting after the ordinary fashion, that interval was long enough for others present to recover from the confusion into which the maiden had cast them; and now, seated once more, Clifford Carpenter gazed curiously and interestedly upon the fair young person who had so boldly proclaimed his innocence.

Judge Vigo, as this was, after all, but an irregular sort of trial, did not consider it beneath his dignity to act as examiner himself, and without calling on either side to lend him assistance, put question after question with a mildness foreign to his usual demeanor while occupying the bench.

These queries brought forth the fact that this witness had only that same morning learned of the black charge brought against Clifford Carpenter, and knowing that he was innocent of the crime, she had hurried at once to make that important statement.

"You say you are assured of the prisoner's innocence, witness?"

"I know he never—He could not have killed that poor man, sir!"

"How do you know it, pray?"

There was a slight pause at this, and hardly one present but listened with bated breath for the answer. It came, slowly, steadily, though all could see how the witness was calling upon her will-power to keep her tones clear and steady.

"Because I saw the fatal shot fired, sir, and this man never held the deadly weapon!"

Up to this point Theron Carew had been held in check by Miles Honeyman, but now he twisted himself free and hastily called out:

"Your Honor! I must ask you to place the witness under oath, that the opposition counsel may have no room for kicking when—"

"We join in that request, your Honor," gravely spoke up the prosecuting attorney. "All we ask for is the truth, and against that there will be no kicking—from our side, at least!"

Without waiting for more, the witness lifted her right hand like one fairly familiar with the forms, though her voice quavered a trifle as she uttered:

"If you please, sir, I would rather I mean to speak naught save the simple truth, and so—I am ready, your Honor!"

At a nod from the judge the book was brought, and the young woman took it in her left hand, lifting it to her lips voluntarily.

The oath was administered in due form, and then Judge Vigo began over again, after a more regular fashion.

He first gained the information that the witness was named Gerva Gale; that she was of American birth, aged nineteen years; that she was a stenographer and typewritist by occupation, being then in the employ of Messrs. McBride & Stowell, lawyers.

"How did you chance to be an eye-witness of this killing, please?"

Those fair cheeks flushed hotly and those big, brown eyes were temporarily veiled by their long and curled lashes; but the witness quickly rallied, to say:

"I was at my rooms, that evening—last Friday, your Honor. A note was brought me, purporting to come from my employers, stating that they had two very important depositions to be taken down, and asking me to come at once to their office."

"And you complied, of course?"

"I never for an instant suspected aught was wrong, for—how could I, sir? The note was written on our office-paper, and surely seemed to be the handwriting of Mr. McBride, our senior partner."

"There was a cab at the door, waiting for me, and I hurried down and out of the house, feeling sure that the business must be of great importance, else the firm would never have sent for me so urgently."

The witness paused here, moistening her feverish lips like one who finds the ordeal a far more trying one than she had calculated upon.

Now that he was in his official seat once more, and had recovered from the surprise he had sustained, Judge Vigo resumed his customary manner, and was the stern official rather than the kind-hearted human.

His long term as such had turned the judge into a profound skeptic so long as he sat upon the bench, and he now looked upon all witnesses as being capable of telling the truth only through fright or when taken by surprise and off their guard.

This was what Gerva now read in his stern visage, and though she meant to tell naught save the simple truth, those cold and glittering eyes sent a disagreeable chill through her person.

"You found a cab in waiting? How did you know that vehicle was intended for you, please?"

"The note told me one would be sent, and I was given so little time for reflection, sir! I never for an instant thought of trick or trap, and so—as the driver opened the door for me, I stepped inside without hesitation."

"And when once in it?"

"The door closed after me immediately, and then—I was caught in the arms of a man,

who—who covered my face and choked me so badly I couldn't cry out for help loud enough to make anybody else hear!"

Swiftly came these words, but so agitated was the witness by the ugly memories thus invoked, it was no easy task for either judge or lawyers to follow her meaning.

As a matter of course, Clifford Carpenter had not been the least interested one present, although he had not as yet spoken a word since the abrupt entrance of Gerva Gale. But now he quickly filled a glass with water from the pitcher standing near, and with a silent bow, gave it to the young lady, falling back again to his position.

Gerva bowed gratefully to him, and taking a swallow or two, once more faced the judge, conquering her emotions and forcing back her usual composure.

"You say you were caught in the arms of a man," coldly repeated Judge Vigo, with pencil-butt tapping the desk before him. "You tried to summon assistance, but in vain. Now—what followed, please?"

"I struggled as hard as I could, your Honor, for I knew now that I had fallen into some terrible snare; but the cab was driven off at a rapid rate, the wheels making a loud noise on the paved street, and then—a hand was on my throat, choking me, while a wet cloth was pressed over my face!"

"You were drugged, then, we are to understand, witness?"

"With chloroform, yes, sir. I recognized the odor, for I had taken it twice at the dental parlors. And though I fought all I could to retain my senses, sir, I failed! It seemed like cruel death—then! And after an awful sense of falling—falling—I lost all consciousness!"

There was naught of acting in this portion of Gerva Gale's testimony, at all events. Not one who saw and heard her then could for an instant doubt her perfect sincerity; for in actions even more than in words did she describe that fight against odds.

Even Judge Vigo was touched to a slight degree, and he waited with unusual patience for the witness to recover her calmness before he put his next question.

"How long did you remain under the influence of the drug, Miss Gale?"

"That I can only give a vague guess at, sir," replied Gerva, steadyng her voice as best she could. "But when I next began to recognize what was going on about me, we were driving along a lonely road, somewhere outside of the city, it seemed."

"Then you had no idea just where you were?"

"I had not, then, but I've learned since: we were driving through Forest Park, where the—the tragedy took place!"

"Why have you waited so long before speaking out, Miss Gale? Surely you ought to have made known all this long ago."

"I could not before, sir, as I will explain hereafter, but for now—I had hardly recovered my consciousness when the cab was violently checked, and then—at the open window, where the moonlight fell fairly across his face—I saw Mr. Preston, the man who was—murdered!"

"Wait, please," coldly cut in the judge, one bony hand lifting by way of further warning. "Before you go any further, Miss Gale, kindly explain how you were able to recognize that face so readily. Remember, you were just rallying from a drugged stupor, please."

"I am upon my solemn oath, your Honor," proudly spoke up the fair witness, twin spots of color marking her cheeks the while. "I did recognize Mayo Preston. I had seen him three times, at the office, where he called on business. I had to do both short-hand and typewriting at his dictation, and so grew familiar with his features."

"He came to the open window of the cab, and called out a name: that name I failed to catch, but it seemed to render the villain who had abducted me wild with rage, for he cursed and swore, then—oh, it was awful—awful!"

Gerva Gale covered her face with her hands, her trim figure shuddering convulsively as that terrible picture was thus recalled; but once more she bravely rallied, to swiftly add:

"The man who was inside the cab with me thrust forward a revolver, and as Mr. Preston receded, turning as though to run

away, he fired! I saw the flame—I saw the poor gentleman throw up his arms and give a choking cry of agony as he fell—shot dead!"

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### PROVING AN ALIBI.

GERVA GALE sunk back into the chair which the policeman had provided for her accommodation, once more hiding face in hands as she tried bravely to conquer the awful emotions thus revived with cruel force.

Silence reigned throughout the courtroom, for all present felt that this might be the solution of a black mystery, or, at least, the saving of an innocent person from unmerited punishment.

Judge Vigo alone seemed unmoved, and after a brief waiting he tapped desk with pencil, then spoke:

"You can retain your seat, Miss Gale, if you prefer, but time is passing and there is still much to be accomplished. Now—after this shot was fired: what did you do?"

While he was speaking, Gerva Gale rose to her feet, pale but composed, facing that cold, unfeeling machine of justice with a strength which he, unwittingly, supplied her.

"What more could I do, your Honor? I remember screaming, and trying to break away from the arms which again caught me. And then—the chloroform was used again, and I lost all consciousness."

"You are confident, of course, witness, that you had recovered your senses during that brief interval? This was not all a dream, a fancy, born of the drug?"

"Was it a dream, a fancy, sir, that Mayo Preston was found dead, with a bullet in his brain?" cut in Theron Carew, before Gerva could shape a fitting answer. "Begging your pardon, your Honor, but this strongly concerns my client, and I really could not help putting in my oar."

"I am telling nothing save the Gospel truth," steadily declared the maiden. "I have naught to conceal, naught to gloss over, and so care little what questions are given me; the truth is the truth, and no man can make it even appear like a falsehood."

If Judge Vigo felt this dignified rebuke, not a change of feature betrayed as much, but his voice was a little less stern when he spoke again, after that brief silence:

"You say you saw the shot fired, Miss Gale; you saw the deceased stagger away and fall; now—who was the person who fired that shot?"

"I wish I could tell you that, sir, but it is beyond my power."

"How so? You could recognize a face which, as you admit, you saw but a few seconds, yet you cannot tell who the man was with whom you had spent so long a time?"

"Because he kept his face hidden from me, sir, from first to last. There is no street-lamp in front of the place where I room. It was dark when I stepped into the cab, and I have already told you what followed."

"But later on. You could recognize your location; you saw you were driving through Forest Park; you distinguished the face of Mayo Preston, as you state; then—why couldn't you make out a face which was so much nearer to you, for so much longer, pray?"

"Because that villain had his face covered, sir," steadily replied Gerva. "He wore either a mask, or a handkerchief tied over his face. I am positive of this, for I touched the cloth while I struggled with him against being drugged for the second time!"

Theron Carew gave an audible chuckle at this positive response, but Judge Vigo frowned darkly, rapping desk with knuckles, then leaning a little further over his desk as he slowly, distinctly uttered:

"You assert your complete ignorance as to the real identity of the person who fired that shot, Miss Gale? Then perhaps you will explain why you are so positive the prisoner at the bar did not kill Mayo Preston?"

It was a shrewd question, pointedly put, but the witness hesitated only for an instant before replying:

"For one reason, sir, this gentleman is a much larger man than the person who shot poor Mr. Preston."

"That is merely your impression, of course. Now—when did you see Mr. Carpenter last, prior to that Friday evening?"

"Week before last, sir, on Ladies' Day, at the race-course."

"What was the subject of your conversation that day, please?"

"With Mr. Carpenter?" asked the witness, flushing just a trifle as her big brown eyes glanced that way, then came back to the sharp visage of the presiding judge. "None, sir! I never spoke to the gentleman in my life, and only knew him as the owner of Dixie, the horse that won the race my companion was most interested in. She told me who the gentleman was, your Honor."

At this juncture Theron Carew interposed, no longer able to contain his ardor, for he began to see a full and complete clearance for his client if the facts of the case were properly brought out.

"I beg leave to ask a question or two, your Honor, in the interests of my client. I take it we all wish to get at the bottom facts, without caring so much just how we get there! And so—have I permission?"

Judge Vigo nodded assent, and Carew quickly asked:

"You say it was dark in front of your place of residence, Miss Gale, when you stepped into the cab. Now—you had eaten your supper?"

"I had, yes, sir."

"And the hour was—about what, please?"

"Of that I can't be positive. I had been reading for some little time, and my book was very interesting. Still, I hardly think it could have been much past eight o'clock. The evening was cloudy, and my room was poorly lighted from without, so I lit the gas earlier than usual."

Theron Carew gave a brisk nod of approval as he flashed a glance toward the judge, then volunteered the information:

"The extreme boundary of Forest Park is barely six miles from the Court House, your Honor! And with a fair horse—what time should you say the cab was halted in the Park, Miss Gale?"

Gerva hesitated, for she knew how much might depend upon her answer to this question. If she had not so divined by instinct, the eager light upon nearly all faces about her would have told as much.

After time for reflection, the fair witness spoke in reply:

"Only a few seconds before the shooting occurred the cab made a half turn as the road curved. That brought the moonlight in at one window, and as it shone full into my face, I couldn't well help noticing it."

"And you saw—take plenty of time for reflection, my dear girl!" said Carew, with no little difficulty holding his excitement in check. "You say you couldn't help noticing the moon; now—can't you at least approximate the hour, by that, Miss Gale?"

"No, sir; for I haven't noticed just when the moon rises now. But so far as I could judge, the moon was not more than an hour or two above the horizon."

"I ask your Honor to note that statement!" cried Theron Carew, but Judge Vigo was already turning in his office-chair to more nearly face the calendar which hung against the wall just back of his position.

Deliberately putting on his glasses in order to leave no margin for error, the judge studied the finer print, then slowly swun back once more, speaking in slow, grave tones:

"According to that, then, the killing must have taken place somewhere between the hours of nine and ten P.M."

"Then we've got two whole hours to go on, please the mighty powers!" cried Carew, turning to grip the hands of his client with hearty vigor. "For we can account for each and every second of time up to the striking of midnight, to say nothing of the time it would take for us to go clear out to Forest Park in a cab with—I knew it, all the time!"

Then, dropping those tingling hands, the excitable little lawyer faced the bench, speaking hurriedly:

"And so, your Honor, I move you that this—"

"Not quite so fast, if you please, Mr. Carew," coldly interposed Judge Vigo, rapping the desk before him. "This is a

entirely too much for granted, it seems to me."

"Which was just what I intended saying, your Honor," declared the prosecuting attorney. "Of course Miss Gale is perfectly sincere in all she now says, but she admits her ignorance of the time, and can only be guessing at the position of the moon when that fatal shot was fired."

"Call it a guess if you like, sir, but even then it grants us a margin of at least three hours!" impetuously broke in the prisoner's lawyer. "And if the man who received Miss Gale in the cab—and I am reasonably confident even you can't doubt so much!" with a profound bow to the prosecuting attorney. "If the man who received Miss Gale as she entered the cab, was the same individual who fired that shot, how could my client possibly be the criminal, your Honor? For the witness was in that criminal's company hours before midnight, while my client—"

Theron Carew broke off without finishing that sentence, waving a hand and showing a lofty scorn which told how useless further talk was, in his estimation.

Gerva Gale now spoke up, with veiled eagerness:

"May I speak further, your Honor?"

"If you can cast any clearer light upon this matter, certainly."

"As I said before, sir, when I cried out at that cruel shot, the murderer grasped me and forced me to again inhale chloroform. The cab set off at a reckless rate, but I never knew just when it stopped, for, as I told you, I quickly lost all consciousness.

"But when I recovered my senses, I was inside a room, bare and forlorn, with hardly any pretense at being furnished, save for the bed upon which I was lying, and—a clock!"

"How came you to notice that bit of furnishing, pray?" sharply asked the judge, suspicion still lingering in his hard face. "You are under oath remember, witness!"

"I know I am, sir, and under that oath I'm speaking nothing more or less than the simple truth! I noticed the clock, for it stood on a mantel-piece directly opposite where I was lying on the bed. And I noticed it because it began striking just as my eyes came to that spot!"

"What hour did it strike Miss Gale?"

"Twelve o'clock—midnight, upon my Bible oath!"

A silence which was almost painful followed this solemn assertion, then Theron Carew and the prosecuting attorney each grasped a hand of the prisoner at the bar, vying with each other as to who should shake it the most cordially!

"What house was this, Miss Gale, and where is it located?" asked the judge, apparently not seeing that irregular proceeding just then.

"I don't know," cried Gerva, with a burst of hot indignation, "but I'll find out, if there is any law in the land! I will know, sir!"

"And so you shall, Miss Gale," earnestly declared the prosecuting attorney, dropping one hand to clasp another much fairer and more agreeable to the masculine touch. "I'll probe this vile outrage to the very bottom, and you shall have ample revenge, never fear, Miss Gale!"

Then he turned to the bench, adding the assurance that he would vouch for Miss Gale, as he knew the firm in whose employ she was to be absolutely reliable, and that they would never retain an improper character in their service.

He also said that, so far as he was concerned, this case was at an end; the accused had clearly proven an *alibi*, and he moved the court declare Clifford Carpenter free as air, without stain or blemish on his character, so far as that charge was concerned.

This was promptly done, Justice Vining in the little crowd which gathered around to congratulate the Plunger who laughingly received their good wishes and returned their hand-shraps. But the other wished him well, and freed himself as quickly as possible, to look around for Gerva Gale—but in vain!

That fair witness had vanished, just as abruptly as he had appeared.

## CHAPTER XV.

### A VENOMOUS LITTLE RASCAL.

AFTER all, Jasper Deagle, far better known by the public at large as "Jockey Jap," gained precious scant satisfaction from the arrest of his erstwhile employer, Clifford Carpenter.

Even that first flush of vicious triumph as he saw the Plunger led away from his stables under arrest, was smothered in the convenient feed-bin, where he spent a very disagreeable quarter of an hour, and at the end of which time was booted off the premises by indignant Bird Hummer.

Then, too, that incarceration failed to put an end to the brilliant progress of the Carpenter Stables, for the veteran trainer was fully capable of carrying out the instructions of his absent master, and on both days of the new week the colors so often carried first under the wire by that human ape, Jockey Jap, were among those listed as winners.

And then the tidings spread like wildfire throughout the land: the Plunger was once more a free man, cleared from even the faintest shadow of suspicion!

As might have been expected, this tidings was received at the racing stables as early as anywhere else, and very few of the habitants of that odd circle but what joined in a hearty cheer for the popular Plunger, or were both ready and eager to join in drinking his good health!

One of those few of course was Jasper Deagle, whose vicious hatred for the master who had so pointedly degraded him as a premier jockey had grown more intense with each hour which passed over his head.

And now, watching his chance, with one keen eye ever on the alert against surprise from Bird Hummer or the released Plunger, Jockey Jap was on vengeance bent, caring precious little just what lengths he ran just so he might cheat hangman and escape the prison bars.

That had been a fairly busy day for the Carpenter stable, but many willing hands make swift work, and, as good luck had stood faithfully by them, "all hands" were in humor to match now that the more pressing labors were at an end.

Skulking along in the darkness, Jockey Jap, hardly to be recognized now that he no longer wore the racing colors, gave a low, quavering whistle to attract the attention of a colored lad, then stepped far enough into the light for those white-rimmed eyes to recognize him.

"De good Lawd, boy!" chuckled the negro as he slouched nearer that figure, grinning broadly the while. "Yo' betta didn't lass de Hummin'-Bird coteh ye, Jock, fo' he done tuck yo' hide to make a scrub-rag—so he done say, boy!"

"Augh! Never you bother 'bout the Hummer, Mack Harris," snapped back Jockey Jap, at the same time causing a handful of silver coin to jingle musically in his pocket. "It's you I'm after, boy! And—what's that, Mack?"

The jockey thrust a small object into the dusky paw which was extended with a warning gesture, and, after a brief survey, the colored lad spluttered forth:

"Ole har'-foot! De rabbit-foot, fo' suah, boss?"

"You know it, Mack! And you know how dead-sure winner it is, too! Did I ever lose a race when I toted that, boy? And now—what'll you give me for it, Mack?"

Something like a muffled howl of despair broke from those thick lips, while the young fellow shuffled nervously from foot to foot as though the ground had suddenly grown scorching hot beneath his soles.

"Good Lawd! Me? Why, boss, ef dem ginewine har'-foots was gwine fer penny a fousand, I couldn't buy jest one teeny-tonty toe-mail!"

"The bones gone back on you, Mack?" asked the tempter with a low, chuckling laugh as he again caused that music to fill his pocket. "That is why you ought to tote the rabbit-foot, Mack! That's just why I've took the trouble to hunt you up, tonight, for—closer, you black imp!"

With lips almost touching ear, Jockey Jap swiftly breathed:

"For three nights running, I've had the same dream, Mack! For three nights running, I've had a spirit come to tell me this: Give Mack Harris the sacred rabbit foot, and

back it up with a good round stake! Tell him to rush his luck with the bones, and going equal shares will make you both independently rich!"

"De—good—Lawd!"

"True as death, Mack! And the spell holds good until the moon changes! And so—your paws, Mack!"

The negro, quivering all over with excitement held forth both eager hands, and Jockey Jap gave him the coveted "charm," together with a good sum in silver coin, with which he had provided himself for that express purpose.

"Hold fast all I give you, Mack!" he said in guarded tones, though it was too nearly dark where they were standing to run much risk of discovery. "The rabbit-foot, and ten dollars! Now remember though! The charm will break wide open the instant you tell anybody—anybody, you understand?"

"De good Lawd! I wouldn't tell even my own se'f, boss!"

"If you ever tell where you got the charm, it'll knock your luck to never-come-back, Mack! 'Twill curl your fingers up and make 'em so stiff you can't give the lucky snap as you flirt the bones! 'Twill bung your eyes so you can't tell crap from—Steady, boy!"

Jockey Jap broke off abruptly as he caught sight of the trainer, Bird Hummer, just outside the door to the stable where Dixie was kept; but after a few words to one of the stable-lads near the fire burning dimly under a scrubby tree, the trainer stepped back out of sight.

Warned by this that time was passing rapidly, Jockey Jap hurried along with his cunningly-shaped temptation, although little more was needed to make sure those lips were firmly sealed.

Like the majority of his race, Mack Harris was very superstitious, and being a confirmed "crap-shooter" besides, the scheming little ape felt that he was running no serious risk in that quarter.

"The spirit said you must crowd your luck, Mack, but that don't mean for you to bet so high as to scare off the lads, remember! Just coax 'em on, at first! And—don't let the old man bluff you, though, if he was to get hungry for a bite of your pudding, boy!"

Mack Harris chuckled oilily as he swung his big flat feet in an almost double shuffle, forced to give vent to his growing excitement after some fashion, or "go bu'st!"

"Don't forget, boy! It's you to shoot, me to stake, both to whack up on a dead square divvy! Don't think to hold out any of the stuff, boy, for that'd sure hoodoo your luck! Now—go crowd 'em, Mack! Go sing the song to make 'em all go dizzy, boy!"

Jockey Jap gave the colored boy a vigorous shove as he spoke those words, having held him back so long; and as Mack Harris scurried away in wild glee at the glorious prospects thus opened before his vision, the apish tempter crouched there in the shadows, grinning and mowing, shaking his clinched fists toward the stables, even so quickly feeling confident that he would siphon his first draught of revenge that very night!

As only a born crap-shooter knows how, Mack Harris quickly had a dusky cloud gathered close by that little fire, and with precious small delay the bones (or dice) were being flirted, dirty fingers were snapping "for luck," thick lips were issuing guttural "hah's!" and all the mystic words, signs, gestures and set phrases of a dozen born crapsters were heard upon the fresh evening air.

From the very start fortune favored Mack Harris, and that naturally confirmed his belief in "the charm," so he began "to fly high," greeting with lofty scorn the modest "shoot you five" or anything less than "shoot you qualah big, boy!"

Crap-shooting seems to form part and parcel of racing-stable life, and when a really "likely game" is on, men who could readily pass their checks for five figures have been known to kneel in the dirt with their impish-looking stable-lads, flirting the bones as eagerly as any other.

And veteran though he was, Bird Hummer could not long resist that strange fascination, and from doorway he gradually moved outward until fairly crowding those dusky shapes. And then, as Mack Harris grew more jubilant over his continued suc-

rising so high as to cry out in proud defiance, "Shoot ye fo' dollah, niggahs!" he jumped into the game with a "cartwheel" paving his way, and gruffly said:

"You growin' too mighty biggity, boy! Reckon I'll have to crop them wings o' yours, Mack! Dollar goes, and—come crap!"

In fierce triumph Jockey Jap watched the success of his artful scheme, and as Bird Hummer moved away from that open door, the apish rider crept toward it, one claw like hand fumbling in his bosom where a small bottle was snugly hidden until wanted for use.

All attention was centered upon the game of craps, and Jockey Jap found nothing to hinder his entrance, then made directly for the box reserved for Dixie, "Queen of the Turf," whenever racing duties demanded her presence at those stables.

Thoroughly familiar with the place, Jockey Jap lost no further time, but at once attempted to carry out the diabolical purpose which had brought him there; but almost at the start, he encountered an obstacle.

As he tried to open the door, by means of which admission was gained to that well-fitted box, he found the door fast-locked!

He dared not spend the time it would take him to pick that lock, even if the feat was practicable, and as he made out the shape of the mare reclining at her ease after her supper, he chirped softly, reaching hand through the bars, hoping to lure the mare into rising for that caressing touch.

Dixie gave a low whimper of recognition, but that was all. Jockey Jap had never sought to win her love, for love in return was beyond his animal nature; and now he found his disadvantage.

Fearing to linger longer, or to make more earnest efforts to fetch the mare to her feet and within his reach, the venomous little ape gave over that part of his evil scheme, and moving away to the feed-bin, took out the bottled drug he had provided for just such an emergency, and sprinkled the food with the powerful "dope" that vial contained!

With a stick which he found at his feet, Jockey Jap gave the feed a vigorous stirring, muttering a savage curse as the powerful scent rose around him like a cloud of steam; and then, just as he was closing the lid over that "doctored" mess, he gave start and little cry of angry fright.

For surely that was the cheery voice of Clifford Carpenter speaking to Bird Hummer, out yonder?

The villain cowered there like a scared rat, for he knew that the stable lamps would almost surely betray him in case he should try to slip forth by way of that open door; and—worse luck!

Just as he began stealing along, hoping to hide in the further depths, or else to emerge by some other door, the tall, athletic figure of Plunger Carpenter darkened that doorway, and his genial voice was raised in answer to some indistinct remark given by a companion.

"Of course he did, Miles, but—What the dence!"

Carpenter cut his answer short with a fierce exclamation, for his keen nostrils could not miss that peculiar odor, which was fully as perceptible to the nose of the Sporting Detective as that worthy came up.

"Smells like a whole drug store had gone bu'st!" was Honeyman's contribution, but followed swiftly by more earnest speech: "The mare, Cliff! Look out, everybody! It's a case of 'dope,' or I'm a liar!"

Seeing that his flight was cut off, and knowing that discovery meant swift and bitter punishment, Jockey Jap gave a snarling curse and leaped upon the Plunger, knife in hand, striking as he came!

## CHAPTER XVI.

### GUARDING THE QUEEN OF THE TRACK.

With a sharp yet broken cry of mingled rage and pain, Clifford Carpenter staggered back before that wild-beast-like assault, and sailing fairly over his shoulder, dashing the savage straits with Miles Honeyman turned at the blunt scene stage, Jockey Jap struck the earth with a force that might have stunned an ox, but which only sent him rolling like into the deeper depths long the stable walls.

Carpenter reeled dizzily against his companion, a sudden faintness assailing him and robbing his limbs of their strength just when he needed it the most.

"I've got it—got it—hard!" he gasped, saved from falling at full length only by those muscular arms.

"Here! this way, Hummer! Everybody—here, ye lazy devils!" sharply cried the Sporting Detective, losing sight of the assassin as that athletic figure hung limply upon his hands.

The natural confusion was added to by the fact of Jockey Jap's knocking over the lantern which hung close by the open door, thus casting a deeper shadow over the place for the time being.

The wounded Plunger rallied just as swiftly as he had collapsed at biting plunge of that venomous weapon, and even as Miles Honeyman called aloud on the stable-hands for aid and assistance, he felt himself grappled by hands and circled by arms which threatened to squeeze the very life out of him!

"Cut me, will ye, infernal cur? Dope the Queen when—I'll choke your wind until you croak like a—no ye don't, now!"

"For Heaven's sake, man!" gasped the amazed detective, as he struggled to keep his throat clear of those clutching fingers. "I'm not—It's me, you blank idiot!"

Just then the red glow of a lantern flashed fairly into the face of the angrily protesting detective, held by the hand of Bird Hummer, and recognizing his whimsical mistake, Carpenter relaxed his grasp, staggering back with utter bewilderment written upon his flushed face.

All this naturally consumed time, and before the confusion caused by those errors could be entirely dispelled, all chance of catching the desperate assassin was gone.

For the first few minutes Clifford Carpenter would not hear to letting his wound be examined, gruffly declaring it nothing worse than a shallow scratch, and himself leading that ardent hustle in quest of the knifer; but all efforts proved in vain, and then the Plunger consented to let Honeyman open his blood-wet garments.

"But you don't need to play assistant-surgeon, Hummer!" he gruffly uttered, making a fierce gesture before which the cowed trainer bowed in silence. "Look to the mare, you fool! If harm's come to her—Fetch me word she's all right, or I'll work such a clearance in this den as'll surprise the natives for ever and aye!"

And wrought up to still fiercer passion by his own words, the Plunger brushed the detective to one side, rushing into the stable again and to the box-stall where the mare was now upon her feet, whimpering a bit through the unusual excitement.

That lock yielded quickly to his touch, and heedless of his flowing blood, his smarting wound, the Plunger caressed his pet while examining her from foretop to fetlock, only giving over when fairly well assured that no injury had been wrought in that quarter by yonder infamous interloper.

Then, placing Bird Hummer on guard over the feed-bin, bidding him crack away with his gun at any one—"man, ghost or devil!" as he put it—who dared approach that place before his return.

Then Carpenter submitted in fair earnest to the not wholly unskilled hands of the Sporting Detective, who ruthlessly sacrificed cloth to his anxiety, but finally giving a long breath of relief as he said:

"That's the blessing of a full and heavily muscled chest, my boy! It's a nasty-looking gash, but not deep enough to lay up long in lavender, please the pigs!"

"It don't reach the cavity, then, Miles?"

"Never a bit of it, my hearty! But 'twould have gone there, if that devil had been given time or opportunity to deal a direct blow! For—Who was it, Carpenter?"

"I'll never tell you—now!"

That final word came barely loud enough for the detective's keen ears to catch its meaning, and then Honeyman bent all his energies to patching up that cut, since the Plunger bluntly declared that he would not waste time in either sending for or going to a regular surgeon.

"There's more important work on hand, Miles, and you'd ought to realize as much

without my telling! The mare is—Well, lads?"

Several of the stable-boys (one of whom wore nearly white hair, by the way! but all such are "boys" while in the service) came up just then, but they had nothing better than failure to report.

Nothing had been seen of the "knifer," unless, indeed, he was smart enough to play an innocent part and even join in that fruitless hunt!

"I hardly reckon he tried any such trick as that, boys," negated the Plunger, gravely, not caring to give his own growing suspicions more open expression. "He racked out, of course, and is lost to us in town long before this!"

With the aid of a sheet of court-plaster which was supplied by Bird Hummer, Honeyman drew the lips of the thoroughly-cleansed wound together, and then applied a bandage as well as he could while laboring under such difficulties; for the Plunger stubbornly refused to retire, or even to "take a back seat," while others looked after his interests.

"No use croaking, old man! I'd keep afoot, though I had fifty such scratches; at least long enough to make sure of the Queen! Why, man, dear, just think of it! If aught should happen to Dixie now—with all I've plunged on her, next race—to leave out all my friends have pinned to their faith—but I just can't think of it, either!"

Seeing how fiercely his friend was wrought up by that happening, the Sporting Detective yielded against his better judgment, and having temporarily patched up his hurts, joined the Plunger in investigating matters more thoroughly.

Bird Hummer was taken off his perch upon the feed-bin, and the contents closely examined.

That strong, peculiar odor which had first aroused their suspicions of foul play, had nearly evaporated by this, but as both men tested the feed with tongues, they could no longer doubt the fact of some sort of drug having been stirred through the "chop."

"It's 'dope,' easy enough," grimly observed Honeyman, as he spat out the stuff he had been chewing, "but of just what nature is more than I can make out! What say you, Cliff?"

"I'm in your box, pardner, but I'll be wiser before this time to-morrow!" coldly declared the Plunger, as he reserved a portion of the drugged mass, then bade Hummer have the boys make a bonfire of both bin and its contents. "Stay by it, man, until the last grain is burnt past playing the devil with brutes worth a thousand crap-shooting idiots like—Well, don't make me rub it in too mighty deep, old fellow," said the Plunger, his tones softening and one strong hand going forth to rest half apologetically upon that bowed back.

The veteran trainer turned his head to force a smile of gratitude, and from that instant he was forgiven by his master, as completely as though fault had never been.

Miles Honeyman watched all this in silence, frowning a bit as he saw his friend growing milder. Though his tongue was less hot, less apt to fly out in a fierce passion, the detective really was more vengeful than the Plunger.

And now, as he thought of how valuable the life and perfect health of this little bundle of finely tempered sinews and nerves, all wrapped in a velvet skin, was, he grew sterner and more unforgiving.

"You're entirely too easy, Carpenter!" he muttered, as the trainer went out, supervising that burning. "Even if Hummer didn't have a finger in this dirty pie—"

"I'd just as quickly suspect you, Miles Honeyman!"

"Well, had you equal cause to suspect me, I'd be ashamed of my master if he didn't take mighty good care I couldn't work any real harm to such a precious bit of property as Dixie!" bluntly asserted the detective. "And there's not only your own interests at stake, Carpenter, bear in mind, but—think of all the countless thousands up on the Big Bonanza Stakes, with Dixie such a hot favorite!"

"That's precisely what I am thinking about, Miles," gravely answered the Plunger. "And so—what would you do in my place?"

"Guard the Queen of the Track as though my very life was wrapped up in her hide—bless the darling!" impetuously cried the no-longer sleepy sport, with a glowing glance toward the object of their conversation.

"You wouldn't risk keeping her here, then?"

"Not an hour! And if you do—well, old fellow, I'm hardly up to helping you take snuff, and so—you know just what ought to be done."

Enigmatical though that sentence reads, Carpenter apparently had no difficulty in deciphering its meaning, for he gave a brief nod, then turned away to look after the veteran trainer.

Miles Honeyman kept close to Dixie's stall, one hand resting partly under his long coat-tail, where cool fingers gripped something far less innocent than pocket-book or handkerchief, while his steel-blue eyes kept roving around and diving into every nook and corner, longing to sight what he still hardly expected to see—that venomous little villain, Jockey Jap!

For the Sporting Detective instinctively divined the truth. That wild-cat attempt so closely resembled the prior assault which he had witnessed when the "crooked" rider was so sternly "turned down" by his master, that he could not well avoid suspecting Deagle of this dastardly attempt to kill or cripple both master and man.

The "doped" feed was destroyed, and, while the finishing touches were being given, Carpenter questioned his employees, but without learning aught to confirm his withheld suspicions. He never mentioned the name of Jockey Jap, but others did; and, as Mark Harris had vanished into outer darkness, none present had seen the disgraced rider about the premises that day or that evening.

Then, having consulted further with Miles Honeyman, Carpenter had the little mare put into her traveling clothes, and, with a couple of trusty hands to bear them company, he and Honeyman left Bird Hummer in charge of the stables and the other, less valuable, horses.

"Keep all eyes open, old man, and don't let any person inside the stables for the rest of this night," the Plunger said, by way of final caution, then moved off through the night, the gloom being a bit less now that the moon was beginning to show itself in the far east.

"That's a mighty precious bit of property, Miles!" said Carpenter, with a half-sigh as they moved away from the stables. "Of course, I'd never hint as much to any other person, but you—that's different!"

"If Dixie was to lose, or even fail to run—well, 'twould pretty nigh clean me out, and would break me up in business!"

As that little procession moved away toward the gates, a head and pair of shoulders cautiously rose up from cover, and as a clinched fist was shaken after them, a vicious voice came hissing:

"That's twice ye've fooled me, ye devils, but look out! Third time's the charm, and I'll play, even if it costs my very life!"

## CHAPTER XVII.

### ULRICH FARQUHAR TALKS BUSINESS.

"It's a cinch—a lead-pipe cinch for the Queen! I hate to say that even worse than you can hate to hear it, Sport, but—it's out of business hours just now, and for once in a way I can afford to belch up the naked truth!"

"Indeed!"

"And in fact, Farquhar," doggedly persisted the other, bringing a huge and none too clean fist down with a vigorous thump, "I call the Big Bonanza good as won already, and that's a mouthful bad enough to make a rascal sick for a solid year to come!"

"What's the matter with an honest man, Jack Singular?" half quizzically asked "Adonis" Farquhar, white fingers toying with his blond mustache.

"I'm talking of the bookies, of course," bluntly answered he of the odd surname. "And as one of the gang, I tell you what I've hardly dared tell my own self until now: when the flag falls for the start in the Big Bonanza, it'll be 'Dixie first, the rest nowhere!'"

Those delicately penciled brows arched a bit higher, and Adonis languidly murmured:

"And he really seems in earnest, too!"

John Singular gave a surly nod at that sneering quip, which he was far too thick-skinned to fully appreciate, then uttered in return:

"So solid is that belief, sir, I've closed my book and marked it full on Dixie! I never saw a line long enough to fairly show the odds on the Queen, provided she comes to the post well and fit!"

"If!"

Very mildly, very smoothly issued that little word, but John Singular jumped in his seat as though a bomb had exploded right under that otherwise comfortable chair.

His full face flushed hotly, and his cheeks puffed out like a toy balloon, and his little eyes would have been lost in the eclipse if they had not protruded in perfect keeping with the rest.

Ulrich Farquhar smiled faintly at that ludicrous exhibition, lying comfortably back in his cushions, daintily enjoying his scented cigarette the while.

"You don't—is it a regular plant, then, boss?" spluttered John Singular, losing his customary independence in his surprise. "If you've fixed the race so cock-sure, why not—"

"You'd be the very first friend I'd tell of it, John, and since I've not issued that address, why—see?"

The bookmaker collapsed, giving a puffing grunt of disgust.

"The Old Boy himself wouldn't know how to take you, twice hand-running, 'Rich Farquhar,'" he said, surlily, brushing a dingy-hued bandana across his flushed face.

"Yet one of his imps persists in trying to guess, times without number, Jacky!" maliciously retorted the Adonis of the race-course. "But, chaffing aside, how much are you in the hole if Dixie should pull off the Big Bonanza, Singular?"

The bookmaker gave an angry gesture to match his surly tones.

"Too mighty deep, Farquhar! I'd have been all right enough if I'd stuck to plain business, and stuck to regular lines; but no! that wouldn't even begin to satisfy you, and so—well, to boil it down, I stand to lose about ten times as much as I can afford if the Queen comes in a winner! And—she can't lose, man! I tell you over again, 'Rich Farquhar, it's a solid lead-pipe cinch for the little mare!"

There was no room left for doubting the perfect sincerity of the burly bookmaker: that stuck out all over him; and yet his host smiled blandly as he looked with half-closed lids through that delicately-scented vapor.

"There's more 'plungers' than our dear friend Carpenter, then, it would appear, Jacky, lad?" he drawlingly observed. "And you're growing nervous over the outcome, are you? Beginning to weaken in the back, and turn wobbly about the knee-joints, eh?"

"Why wouldn't I, then? You egged me on, from start to finish, but how will that lighten matters any for me when pay-day comes 'round? If I was your brother—if I was your white-headed father, 'Rich Farquhar, you know, as I know, that you wouldn't reach out so much as a darned, dainty finger to keep my head above water!"

It was not often that John Singular gave way so far as this, but he had lost many an hour's sleep of late while trying to figure out, not a winning, but a trifle less than utter ruin!

Possibly the Track Adonis began to realize that there might be actual danger to himself in driving this burly fellow clear over the limit, or, it might be, he had sated his sense of humor; for his manner underwent a decisive change, and discarding the cigarette which he had utilized more as a mask than aught else, he leaned a bit forward, quietly speaking:

"You say that you've placed ten times more than you can afford to lose on Dixie? But you forget to add that you haven't placed one-fiftieth as much against her as you've already won by following my advice!"

"Come, old fellow, be honest for once, and own up to it!"

The burly bookmaker gave another growl, this time mixed with a bit of embarrassment, but Ulrich Farquhar did not care to press

that particular point further, just then, and spoke again:

"You really consider it a poor investment then, Mr. Singular?"

"Not worth ten cents on a dollar, unless Dixie dies or is crippled so badly that she has to go out of training!" doggedly asserted the layer of odds. "Twouldn't have been so mighty bad if you hadn't kept plugging me on, and making me take everything in sight. Why, man, dear, I have the Queen from ten against, all the way down cellar to long odds on! And—I'd sooner bite my own head off for lunch than to be at the track when the Big Bonanza list goes up!"

"Adonis" Farquhar listened calmly to all this, smiling easily the while, but then he quietly uttered in his turn:

"All of which pretty fairly answers my former query, John Singular. You think it's a poor investment, made mainly because I urged you clear beyond your depth; is that the sum total, then, pardner?"

"Well, I don't mean to rough you too brash, 'Rich, but—yes, then!" the finals coming with a snarl as the Sport lifted a warning hand.

"Thanks, awfully! And now—business, Mr. Singular! What will you give me to take all this hideous burden off your shoulders, then?"

"Eh? I don't—what's that?" spluttered the bookmaker, his wits too sluggish for following that meaning closely.

"Business is business, Mr. Singular, and this is a simple business proposition. You say you can't well tote the load I helped put upon your back. You say that the whole investment would be dear at ten cents on the dollar!"

"Well, of course—"

"Of course you were talking a bit extravagantly, Jack, and I'll not try to pin you fast to so low a notch. Still, it's simmered down to a matter of pure business, now, and so I repeat: what will you give me to assume all your books, and win out or pay in on the Big Bonanza?"

Ulrich Farquhar spoke deliberately, almost drawlingly, and thus gave John Singular a bit more time in which to regain his breath and to take at least one superficial dive below that troubled surface.

He knew the Track Adonis far too well to think for even an instant that Farquhar would make a *bona fide* offer to assume such a heavy risk through aught save a surety of making money out of it all; but try as he might, he failed to see where he himself had overlooked any such chance.

There was but the one explanation perceptible to his eyes, and he finally touched upon that chord when he spoke again:

"Why, I thought— Didn't Carpenter bounce Jockey Jap?"

"So the report runs, Jack."

"Then it's only a rumor?" with growing interest showing in face as in voice. "It's only a barney? The Plunger is just trying to lower the odds on his mare, you think?"

"No, I don't think anything of the sort, Singular," asserted Farquhar, taking a malicious pleasure in playing upon those clumsy strings. "The Plunger did bounce the Jap for pulling the mare, last Friday, and he is just proud fool enough not to give Deagle a mount though he knew that would make all the difference between winning and losing the Big Bonanza Stakes!"

At each sentence that face fell, and as the Track Adonis ceased speaking, John Singular growlingly uttered:

"Then it's just a common walk-over for Dixie, if Carpenter puts up a jock who'll merely let the Queen run her own race!"

There was a brief pause, broken by Farquhar, who slowly said:

"If that jockey rides straight, yes! But—do you really reckon Jockey Jap is the only lad money will buy, Jack?"

The bookmaker gave another sudden start at this significant query, but before he could speak, an interruption came: a quick tapping at the closed door, which Farquhar opened in person, giving admission to a tall, gaunt, stoop-shouldered man past middle age, who began with a cordial enough greeting, but broke off abruptly as he recognized the presence of another besides his host.

Farquhar was wholly at ease, however,

and though the two men were perfectly well acquainted with each other, being bookmakers both, he gave them a regular introduction, then added, in blandly chaffing tones:

"All we lack is a fat lamb or a couple of well feathered pigeons to make us perfectly happy; eh, Brierley? Jack is not quite so hungry as usual, Doc, but you and I—we'd ought to get away with the rest of the Bonanza pastry, don't you think?"

"I've got my polite sufficiency full, thank you," grimly retorted the second bookmaker, sitting down, but holding himself rigidly erect, plainly no more at ease than was Mr. Singular, just then.

Both had called by special invitation, but each had counted upon a private interview, and with the suspicion natural to men of their class and calling, each was on the keen alert for trap or snare.

One so keen as Ulrich Farquhar could not well have helped seeing so much, but he gave no outward sign, and reseating himself, he gazed blandly into the gaunt visage of the latest comer, asking:

"Well, Doc, how goes the odds, anyway? Business rushing in the Big Bonanza, for instance?"

Those deep-sunken eyes flashed a wary look toward the rival bookmaker before Brierley ventured a reply, in cold, almost harsh tones:

"Not in my crowded corner, Mr. Farquhar. I reckon I've got enough for a square meal, this time."

"There's little life in the Dixie market, then, you mean?"

"Don't you think it, man!" with a flash of fire in his eyes. "But maybe that's why I'm leaving the table; the Dixie crowd try to make out they're hungrier than ever, and—well, they can have my place at the lunch-counter, thank ye, ma'am!"

"Still showing up the 'long green' are they, Doc?"

"Well, I should remark! They're either turned crazy, or else—"

"Go on, Brierley," quickly said Farquhar as the other checked his impulsive speech. "We're all solid friends here, and—you started to say: what?"

"Well, I don't know as it makes any difference, but—that gang's either crazy, or else they've got all fixed for a regular hog-killing!"

"Do you really think so, Doc? Well, then, tell me this: what discount will you allow if I take your book and assume all risk?"

### CHAPTER XVIII.

#### SCHEMING FOR THE BIG BONANZA.

For the second time this cool query caused a little sensation, and leaning back in his cushioned chair, Ulrich Farquhar plainly enjoyed his portion of it.

Both men were hotly curious, now, knowing the Track Adonis so thoroughly well. They each felt morally certain that Farquhar would never make such an offer in sober earnest without seeing his way clear to winning out, with a few thousands to spare; and with all their knowledge of him, they could hardly doubt his being in earnest now.

Still, the presence of another hindered each bookmaker from giving free vent to that burning curiosity, and, seeing this, Farquhar took the next step.

"I invited you here on business, gentlemen, as you doubtless remember," he said in his blandest of tones. "And so—shall I repeat my question? It includes you both, of course."

"You really mean it all, then?" asked Doc Brierley.

"Else I wouldn't waste your time by saying so. Give me a fair discount and I'll take your books on the Big Bonanza, together with any or all side-bets you may have placed against the Carpenter entry. I'll pay all losses, take all winnings, and never growl at you for letting me down in the hole, gentlemen!"

Ulrich Farquhar spoke rapidly enough now, but still he consumed time sufficient for those two men to rally, and at least partially recover their scattered wits.

And now, as the Adonis of the Track held forth one white, slender-fingered hand, as

though ready to at once assume charge of all their liabilities, each man drew a little back, shaking their heads with almost ludicrous simultaneity.

Ulrich Farquhar seemed vastly surprised at not having his liberal offer fairly jumped at, and asked:

"What does that mean, gentlemen? Surely you comprehend my meaning? Surely you can't for even a moment hesitate about getting rid of such a bad bargain at a modest discount?"

"Well, I don't just know about it!" muttered John Singular, shaking his head with an odd mixture of doubt and shrewdness.

"And for me: if you can afford to take, I ought to afford to hold, looks to me," bluntly declared the other bookmaker. "You're not running around picking up lame ducks at your own expense, 'Rich Farquhar! And so—I'll just hang on to my weight-for-age, and trust to luck for a safe outcome!"

"And you, Jack?" almost mournfully asked Farquhar, turning to more squarely face Singular. "You swore your investment was a dead loss, and now—I can have your book at my own figures, of course?"

"Not by a darn sight!" exploded the other, shoving his chair back as though he anticipated actual robbery by force of arms. "If you're so cock-sure, why— Eh?"

The Track Adonis broke into a low, musical peal of laughter as he lay back among the silken cushions, while his visitors stared at him, one part amazed, the other part angry at a jest which they failed to appreciate at its full worth.

But Ulrich Farquhar was far too shrewd a player to completely disgust or discourage those on whose assistance he calculated for carrying out the audacious scheme he had shaped, together with the Queen of the Turf, Eloise Houghton.

Cutting that exhibition of mirth short, he rose more erect, speaking in gravely distinct tones:

"You mentioned a hog-killing, Brierley, and that's precisely what I'm after, don't you see?"

"But—a little more light, master!" grimly quoted the gaunt-visaged bookmaker. "From my point of view, the Dixie gang bids fair to do the butchering, and we're the ones to help supply the pork!"

"Not if you two fellows will back me up in my plans, Doc," earnestly declared the other, leaning a bit further across the covered table in his ardor, now but thinly disguised.

"Haven't we done our share, I'd like to know?" muttered Singular.

"Up to date, yes; but that isn't quite far enough. You want to hold fast to all you've got, and grab all you can! For—I'm dealing my cards face upwards, now! For I intend making my little pile and retiring from public life after this race, gentlemen!"

The two bookmakers stared with wide-open eyes, and then John Singular ejaculated:

"And a body'd think he really meant just that, too!"

"Which is right where that same body'd ring the bell with a dead-center shot, my noble friend," coolly retorted Farquhar, in no wise taken aback by that far from complimentary incredulity. "Now, let me talk to you along a chalk mark, gentlemen, please!"

"I meant every word I said about taking your books at a decent discount, and that same offer holds good if you care to accept it before I show my hand any further. Now, once for all; will you sell out, or can I count on your sticking to me through thick and through thin, until after that same hog-killing is over?"

There was a brief silence, during which the two bookmakers interchanged half-stealthy glances, but then each declared that, hit or miss, they would stand by the wagers they had already laid.

"Then we'll consider that point settled for good and all," declared Farquhar, with an air of evident relief. "I'm glad of it, too! For I can't well play the game as it should be played without some such aids, and I don't know of any others whom I'd rather share my winnings with than you same lads!"

"If they were only sure of being winnings!"

"Nothing venture, nothing win, you

know," lightly retorted the Track Adonis.

"And now—listen, please!"

"Your decision to hold fast to your books as already made up is all right, far as that goes, but—I want you to pledge me your honor that you will take each and every bet that may be offered on the Carpenter entry, even if you have to give instead of taking odds!"

"Holy smoke!"

"If he isn't crazy, then we surely are!"

With a half scornful smile Ulrich Farquhar waited for the amazement roused by his cool speech to work off, and presently Doc Brierley spoke up in calmer tones:

"Maybe you don't know it, Farquhar, but I never did have any great amount of love for Clifford Carpenter, and that little has grown to less than nothing of recent days. But—with letters big enough to top a stand of circus posters! But, wanting to see the fellow go broke, is a mighty sight different thing to seeing that come 'round!"

"You shall see just that, gentlemen, if you'll consent to follow my lead and obey my orders from now until the day following the Big Bonanza race," coolly asserted the Sport.

"Show us just how you can fetch that about, Farquhar, and I for one will do your bidding, though that forces me through fire and water!" vigorously exclaimed Brierley.

"I a'm's my sentiments, 'Rich," tersely Niagaraized Jack Singular, his florid face growing redder and seemingly still rounder the while.

"You'll be making your independent fortunes out of it, remember, too," further asserted the cunning tempter, seemingly in no great haste to lay bare his secret resources.

"With an if, of course," nodded Brierley. "Well, I'm willing to bear all the risks I've so far assumed, and I'd like well enough to do still more, if by that I could insure the Plunger going flat-broke. But, right here you have the nubbin, Farquhar!"

"While my heart is willing, I'm mightily afraid my constitution wouldn't stand it!"

"Don't jump over the rail before you come to it, Doc., please! I'm not asking you to pile up any further risks on your own account, but to act as my secret agents, you understand?"

"Oh! to act on commission?"

"To take all bets on your account, is it?"

"Just that," coolly declared the Adonis, who seemed to be on the point of blossoming forth as another "plunger," if all he now said was to be taken as sober earnest. "I want you two gentlemen to act as my secret agents, taking every bet against Dixie, or any other entry the Carpenter Stables may have in the Bonanza Stakes."

"Holy smoke, man! That'd break a national bank to half way pay out a loss!" ejaculated John Singular.

"But as I've no intention of paying a loss but of taking a winning, what's the sense in wasting your precious breath, Jack?"

"And—you've fixed it for a dead mortal, I see!"

"Well, that we haven't quite reached, yet," coolly retorted the Track Adonis, smiling blandly. "It ought to be enough for you gentlemen to know that I'll stand all risks, and that before this time to-morrow I'll have at least a dozen other shrewd commissioners in the field, all gobbling up cash and every wager placed on the Carpenter Stables carrying off the Big Bonanza Stakes!"

"A dozen?" echoed Brierley, with a frown as thumb and forefinger nervously pinched his drooping under-lip. "That'll mi my quick hammer odds down, though!"

"Then lay evens against the Queen, and if you can't do any better, lay odds a dead her!" audaciously ordered the schemer. "Didn't I tell you I meant to make this a hog-killing? And—since I've made up my mind to retire from public life after this coup, of course I want to go off the coast in a blaze of fireworks!"

"Well, just so we don't get blown up in your company!" grimly commented Singular who could hardly accustom himself to such a radical course of procedure.

"Follow my orders and you're safe as the Bank of England, Jack!"

"Of course, you believe all that, 'Rich,' but—mighty good and smart men have fall-

just as safe, yet come down an awful cropper, after all!"

"I will not come down a cropper, though!"

"Still, it's barely possible, you'll admit, Farquhar," chipped in Brierley. "And if you should, what security have we? Who'd credit us with acting solely as your agents, if we are to keep your connection a profound secret?"

"As I told you, gentlemen, I have not the slightest intention of failing, this bout," coldly asserted Farquhar. "Still, I'm not asking you to run any wild chances. I'll give you the cash, or its equivalent in solid collateral, for each and every bet you pick up on my account. You needn't take a single step further until you've been thoroughly convinced that the thing is a dead moral. Can I say, or you ask more, gentlemen?"

"We'd be worse than hogs if we wanted it, sir!" cried Brierley, and then the three men clasped hands as they sat around that little table.

"Good!" ejaculated Farquhar, an instant later. "And now, if my news is really as reliable as I feel sure, we haven't any too much time to spare. So—steady, all!"

Ulrich Farquhar cut himself short as some sound met his keen ears, and like one who finds no difficulty in rightly interpreting that sound he swiftly arose, and actually shoved his visitors across the room to an inner door, bidding them keep silence until he should give them a sign.

Then he opened the other door, to admit Jockey Jap, who bluntly said:

"I've made a bloody mess of it, boss, and now—I want the seads so I can rack out of town in a holy hurry—d'y'e mind that, now?"

#### CHAPTER XIX.

##### GIVING JOCKEY JAP THE CURB.

ULRICH FARQUHAR bit short an ugly curse at this address, so entirely different from what he had expected.

One white hand shot forth to grip the apish rider with vicious tenacity, and its mate was quivering menacingly in front of that foreign looking visage as he gratingly spoke:

"You little demon! Full to the neck, again? Didn't I warn you—"

Spitting like an enraged cat, Jockey Jap writhed and squirmed in the grip of his last master, then as he failed to break away, he flashed forth a knife with venomous fury, the rays of the gaselier reflecting brightly, almost blindingly into those angrily glowing eyes.

Farquhar flung the imp half-way across the room, then had him covered with the black muzzle of a derringer even before Jockey Jap could recover his balance, agile and sure-footed though the rascal surely was.

"Steady, Deagle!" with low but painfully distinct tones. "Make a move before I give full permission, and I'll spatter your brains to the four winds of heaven!"

The jockey recognized his master, then, and half-lay, half-crouched as he had fallen, that wicked bit of polished steel showing in relief against his chest.

"Don't shoot, boss!" he said, in husky tones. "I didn't—all I wanted was to save my own self, sir!"

"Stand up, Deagle! Steady—so!" with that grim muzzle following each change of position sure as the finger of fate. "Now, advance and place your knife on this table; take the blade in your hand, Jap! Now—come, handle first!"

Seemingly completely cowed, the little knave shambled forward as directed, then fell back a couple of paces while his master took possession of the weapon, with a deft still sending it across to the rear of the room, sinking its keen point firmly in the wood bordering a window.

As one hand did this, its mate replaced that convenient derringer, and resuming his cushioned chair, Ulrich Farquhar spoke in cold, even tones, while his steel-bright eyes held the imp as by a spell.

"Now hand in your report, Jasper Deagle. In one word, you made the attempt, and failed?"

"Just that, sir," sulkily admitted the degraded jockey, standing like an ordinary culprit before this, his judge.

"Yet, you told me 'twould be a moral, didn't you?"

"And so I could have taken Bible oath, sir! And even you can't blame me, boss, if you'd only hear just all I risked to make my word come true."

"Indeed! Well, suppose you tell me just how you came to botch an easy matter so wretchedly, then?"

The master spoke coldly, even harshly, but the mere fact of his consenting to parley so far seemed to lend the impish jockey at least a portion of his forfeited impudence, and in rapid but intelligible sentences Deagle gave an outline of his evening's work on the race-track.

Making a point of his adroit temptation of Mack Harris, and through his agency that of the wary old trainer, Jockey Jap went on to give in accurate detail what followed after.

He made it perfectly clear why he dared not make any more positive attempt to get at Dixie, then spoke of mixing the poisonous drug with the feed in the little mare's particular bin. But his devilish rancor only came fairly forth when he told of the arrival of Clifford Carpenter, and his deadly attempt to bury that very blade deep in his heart.

More than half expecting to encounter a cunning nest of lies, Farquhar keenly watched that impish face; but he was too keen a judge of character not to realize the thorough earnestness of his evil ally just now.

However much Jockey Jap might be vanishing the rest, in this portion of his report he was giving the naked truth.

"You really cut him, then? How badly, boy?" asked Farquhar, an evil glitter showing in his own eye the while.

"Not deeply enough to lay him out—worse luck!" sulkily muttered the little rascal, with a vicious gesture. "I meant it—I meant it so clean that if the gallows had been before my very eyes, 'twouldn't have weakened my muscles an iota! But the devil guarded him, and he had a right bower of Satan at his elbow too!"

"Who was that?"

"You know; Miles Honeyman, the bloody cop!"

Ulrich Farquhar gave a slight start at that name, but easily covered it over by shifting his position for one more alert.

"Why do you call him a cop, Jap? Surely, Honeyman isn't that?"

"Then I'm a fool as well as a liar, boss," doggedly insisted the other rascal. "I've heard him called a cop more'n once of late, although he does claim to follow the races for a living. And I'm open to lay odds he's paid by the Plunger to act as a sort of bodyguard."

A short laugh greeted that hot outburst, but there was little of genuine mirth in the cackulation.

"You're growing foolish, boy! Honeyman is no more a fly cop than I am; and that's mighty long odds on the other side of the book! But let it drop for now, and get back to your first bluff. What did you mean by that, anyway, Deagle?"

"Well, this climate begins to feel terribly unhealthy for a cove of my weight, boss! Even if those devils didn't actually spot me, to-night, they'll tumble to the fact; for just so I tackled the Plunger last time—don't you remember?"

"They let you go then, and they can't prove aught against you now, Jap. And so—you'll just lie low in cover and take it easy, until we see what steps Carpenter means to take."

"I'd heap sight rather rack out, boss, while the track's clear!"

"And I'd rather you didn't, so consider it settled, Jap," coolly retorted the Track Adonis, with an airy wave of his white hand. "I'll see that life is made easy for you while you're out to grass, and take care to give you plenty of warning in case the Plunger really tries to have you catch the collar; but—right here you'll stay, where I can put a curb on you, old man!"

Jockey Jap shifted uneasily on his feet, claws twining in and out of each other after a nervous fashion. Plainly he was far from being content, but Ulrich Farquhar seemed to take it all for granted.

"I'll keep eyes open, Jap, and if Carpenter takes any steps to lock you up, or even tries

to fasten this bit of knife-play upon your shoulders, rest assured I'll catch on without delay, and you'll skip the town in plenty season. And—now we'll let that flea stick, and settle down to more important business, Deagle!"

"I'm not going to butter you all over with lies, Jap, for that isn't my way, nor would you swallow the slippery bolus, either! But—the way matters now stand, I'd feel quite lost without you where I knew I could lay hand upon you whenever needed!"

"That sounds mighty sugary, boss, but—" Jockey Jap broke off with a shrug which contained far more meaning than he could have crowded into a single sentence.

"There's a heap of 'sugar' in it, too, Jap," declared Farquhar with a low, dry chuckle at his play upon words. "I'll keep you safe from harm so far as this bit of botch-work goes, and then, if no suspicion actually turns your way, I'll pay you big money for riding to beat Dixie in the Big Bonanza Stakes, next week!"

Ulrich Farquhar put as much sugar as he knew how into those tones, but the apish rider shrunk back with a vigorous shake of the head, then blurted forth:

"No ye don't, boss! Not any more o' that sort for me, thank you!"

"Big money, Jap!"

"Big money don't pay for getting lynched by a mob, boss! And if I was to try any sort of crooked work, so soon after pulling the mare—ugh!"

Farquhar frowned blackly at that flat rebellion, and a wicked glitter leaped into his blue eyes as he leaned a bit toward the jockey, slowly speaking:

"Not even if I ask it of you as a particular favor, Mr. Deagle?"

"I'd take heap sight longer chances for you than I would for any other person," doggedly replied the rider, "but not that! I couldn't do anything toward interfering with the mare while so many keen eyes were watching for crooked work, and so—count me out, boss!"

Ulrich Farquhar reached forth a hand to touch a bell, then coldly spoke in his turn:

"Just the contrary, Deagle! I'll count on you to act just as I say, and if you refuse, or if you try to give me the double-cross—listen!"

"I've got you foul, and you know it, Jap! I'll set the law-hounds on your scent if you refuse to do my bidding from start to finish, and even if you could contrive to give me the slip now, I'd run you down if it took my last dollar on earth!"

A light tapping sounded at the outer door, and at a word from the master, a servant entered, to whom Farquhar spoke:

"This young man is put in your charge, Wilson, for this one night at least. Take him to a room, and see that he remains in it until after I'm up in the morning. You understand, of course?"

"Yes, sir. I'll sleep with him, sir!" quietly answered the servant.

"Then—pleasant dreams to you, Jap! And better wisdom be thine when we meet again!" mockingly said Farquhar, bowing them out of the room, closing and locking the door after them.

Returning to his former position, he easily called out:

"I'm ready for you now, gentlemen, please!"

The two bookmakers entered from the adjoining apartment, their faces an odd mixture of emotions, but where disgust and distrust plainly predominated.

"Is that the dead-sure thing you were talking about, Mr. Farquhar?" gravely asked Doc. Brierley, while his companion looked too thoroughly disgusted for immediate speech.

The Track Adonis smiled even more blandly than usual, and coolly glanced from face to face before making any reply. Then he quietly said:

"Sure thing or not, gentlemen, I'm a man of my word, and the offer I made to you a while ago still stands open. Name your discount, and I'll close the bargain once for all, if it is anything like a fair offer!"

"But—Jockey Jap—"

"Is still Jockey Jap, which is the same as saying he's one in ten thousand, my dear Singular. But who told you I included Deagle in my bit of a scheme, pray?"

"What! Didn't you, then? Wasn't it because you reckoned on his nobbling the mare that you—"

"Touch lightly, I beg of you, Doc," interposed the cool sport, with a brief show of his teeth through all that blandness. "Among gentlemen it is customary to term a spade an agricultural implement, I believe!"

"That let's me out, then!" bluntly spluttered John Singular. "So long as Adonis didn't show his being cracked—well, I'm nigh crazy enough for one little family!"

Farquhar laughed easily at this blunt insinuation, but Brierley, who had been keenly studying that enigmatical visage the while, spoke up once more, gravely earnest in both tones and manner;

"I'll keep my book, and take all you ask, on one condition, Farquhar?"

"And that condition, Doc?"

"That you insure Jockey Jap a mount on the horse I name for the Big Bonanza!"

## CHAPTER XX.

### DOC BRIERLEY'S COMBINATION.

EVIDENTLY this was hardly the response Ulrich Farquhar expected to receive, for he partly averted his face, one white hand going up as if to complete the shield against those keen if deep-set eyes.

The silence lasted for probably half a minute, at the end of which the Track Adonis quickly fronted the gaunt bookmaker, speaking in almost harsh tones:

"Show your hand, Brierley, just as I have done! What horse is it you want me to let Jockey Jap ride in that race?"

"Dandy Pat!"

John Singular had been leaning forward with growing interest, but at those words he drew back with a jerk, exclaiming:

"Holy smoke! One crack-brain wasn't enough, so here's another! And that other too infernally crazy for any sort of use, too!"

Ulrich Farquhar seemed scarcely less amazed, though he showed it less grotesquely, and gazed long enough into that gaunt visage to make certain his ears had not deceived him, and that the speaker was in full earnest.

"You look as though you really meant it all, Doc, but—that infernally sulking brute?"

"Just him, and nothing shorter, my good friends," coolly asserted the bookmaker, the ghost of a smile lighting up his features. "I reckon you both know him without going into his pedigree?"

"Well, I should remark!"

"Who doesn't know him?" chimed in John Singular, almost savagely.

"Well, you both know that Dandy Pat can run plenty fast enough to break the Queen's heart!"

"If!" softly murmured the Track Adonis.

"I know he could give chain-lightning a start and then best it to the wire without so much as turning a hair, if—if everybody was betting against the dirty brutel" again exploded John Singular. "And just as surely do I know that if an honest man lays a dollar on him to win, Dandy Pat wouldn't run fast enough to more'n tail a foundered cow!"

Ulrich Farquhar laughed softly at this, and even Brierley smiled a bit more visibly. That graphic sketch so admirable hit off the notorious peculiarities of the aged gelding known to trackites as Dandy Pat.

"I'm not denying the fact that Pat is a genuine rogue, you want to bear in mind, gentlemen," added the gaunt member of that seance. "You both know him and his ways just as well as I do. But that isn't the meat of my nut: and so I say it all over again:

"Pledge me your word of honor, Farquhar, that you will coax, buy or force Jockey Jap to ride Dandy Pat in the Bonanza, and I'll hold my book as made, at my own risk. In addition, I'll act as your agent in taking all the money I meet being offered on Dixie, and that without asking any commission for my services, either!"

"Then you are really in earnest, Doc?"

"Earnest as earnest, 'Rich!"

"Done, then!" and Farquhar reached forth a hand which was fairly swallowed up by that broad palm.

John Singular began to scratch his head thoughtfully as he saw this bargain made and thus ratified; but he drew back a bit, preferring to wait a little longer, in hopes of seeing land looming up through what just now far more nearly resembled misty fog!

Releasing his hand from that firm grip, Farquhar spoke again:

"I'm safe enough in making the bargain, I reckon, Brierley, for I know old Hank Ingalls pretty nigh as well as I do Dandy Pat."

"One's a rogue, the other a fool!" muttered Singular, with a wry grimace as he listened.

"I think I've got influence enough over Ingalls to change his riders, but if I should fail—"

"I'm holding your pledge not to fail, though, Farquhar!" a bit sternly cut in the bookmaker.

"Very well. I'll alter my words to suit you more nearly, Doc," the Track Adonis said, with his hardly ever failing smile. "I'll see that Jockey Jap rides Dandy Pat, unless something happens to Dixie in the interval to throw her out of training and out of the race."

"That won't serve, either," doggedly declared Brierley. "I must insist on the exact terms of my proposal: Jockey Jap to ride Dandy Pat in the race for the Big Bonanza Stakes; just that, and nothing else!"

"Cracked, for ducats!" murmured John Singular. "He really talks as though Dandy Pat could win the race on his merits, now!"

"Which is precisely what I claim, laugh and jest as much as you see fit," coolly asserted the other bookmaker. "Dandy Pat can run like a ghost, from start to finish, when he takes the track well and fit. You won't deny that, Jack?"

"No, but who's to say when the brute is fit?"

"I've seen him, both in his stall and under the saddle. I know old Hank Ingalls has brought him almost on edge and all he lacks to make him fit to run for a king's life, is a few cracking miles! Then—"

"Then Dandy Pat'll play the same old game—hang on to the tail of a leader, and stick there, in spite of all his rider can do, though that jockey were Satan himself, in place of Jockey Jap or any lesser light of the pig skin!" almost viciously declared John Singular.

Ulrich Farquhar laughed softly at that impetuous speech, then said:

"You can't well deny all that, Doc. Jack hits off the Dandy to an iota, as we've all of us learned to our sorrow."

"And Ingalls has only entered the cunning brute for one thing: to pick up a few dollars for feed-money by betting under cover against his own entry. There's always a few 'smart Alecks' who fancy they can scent a hog-killing where any sober man would see the truth."

Through all this Doc Brierley leaned back in his chair, saying nothing, a grim smile playing about his thin lips, his deeply-sunken eyes passing from face to face as the words shifted from tongue to tongue.

Then, when the two men paused as though they fancied quite sufficient had been said, the gaunt bookmaker took his turn.

"That's all true enough, gentlemen, but you'll not deny this one solid fact: Dandy Pat has the heels of all horses entered in the Bonanza, with the single exception of Dixie? And, if he really cares to do so, the chances are in his favor as against Carpenter's mare. Am I right, or am I altogether off my base, please?"

"If he cares!" echoed John Singular.

"Which Dandy Pat hasn't done for two long years gone by, to my certain knowledge," added Farquhar as his quota. "And, even at his best, he was never thoroughly trustworthy, Doc."

"That's all granted without further argument, gentlemen, but with my little combination— But let me come at it from a standing start!

"I know Dandy Pat as well as any other track-follower now living. I know that Ingalls has merely entered him on speculation, meaning him to lose. But I also know that if Dandy Pat could be counted on to run this race from end to end, with a rider up who knew all the ropes, he both could

and would win it on a dead square against Carpenter's mare!"

"Yes," admitted Farquhar, with a nod. "Granting all that, if Dandy Pat came to the post on Bonanza Day, fit and on keen edge, I'd willingly give a shade of odds on his beating the mare!"

"If the moon was made of new cheese, and we were only mice, and there wasn't a cat in the kingdom, and never a trap invented for—holy smoke!" exploded Jack Singular, his red cheeks pufing out like a toy balloon, freshly inflated.

"I'm talking business, not nonsense, Mr. Singular. And you, Farquhar: coax or buy over Hank Ingalls; put Jockey Jap on Dandy Pat, and make him thoroughly understand that he is to ride straight, according to my instructions, and—Dandy Pat wins race and money!"

"Ten to one against him, even then, Doc!" cried out Singular.

"Done—in thousands, Jack!" coolly retorted the bookmaker, taking out the tools of his trade in readiness to make a note of the wager. "If you really care for any more at the same rate, just save time by counting up your assets, and I'll take it in a lump!"

Instead of making retort or reply, John Singular stared at the other betting man with round eyes and parted lips. He seemed like one fairly dazed, and Ulrich Farquhar interposed for once in the role of peacemaker.

"Put up your pencil and book, Doc. We'll have all the betting we can handle outside of our own ranks, and if you really have a secret for making Dandy Pat run true to his old form—"

"That's precisely what I have got, too!" cut in the other, with an actual grin showing itself upon his saturnine visage. "Complete my combination by insuring me Jockey Jap as rider, and we'll make that little hog-killing you spoke up look like a sheep-washing in comparison!"

"What's the rest of your combination, Brierley?" asked Farquhar, no longer trying to disguise his strong curiosity. "Surely you're not thinking of giving the Dandy the old 'dope'?"

"Well, not exactly 'dope' the old rascal, 'Rich, but I do mean to electrify him!"

"I knew it!" blurted forth John Singular, once more with his every feature filled with disgust: "I knew 'twas some such played out notion, and now—"

"If you really think all that, Mr. Singular, why not back up your opinion after the only fashion befitting a gentleman?" coldly asked the other bookmaker, once more producing pencil and betting-book. "Come and see me, Johnnie! Money talks mighty sight louder than wind, and—it takes cash to buy good whisky!"

But once more Ulrich Farquhar interposed, forcing the angered bettor to put up his tools and sink back into his seat. With a few crisp sentences he placed a lock upon the lips of his other guest for the time being, then gravely faced the elder bookmaker, saying:

"I'm willing to give you full credit for being in sober earnest, yet it does seem to me that you're willing to rush in where angels might well fear to tread!"

"You think it's a fraud, then?"

"Well, not quite so bad as that, if I've caught your meaning correctly. I know the batteries have worked well in some stray cases, but I likewise know that, just when the most depends on their doing the best work, they are too mighty apt to fail, or even worse!"

"Like when Balbriggan's rider broke the wire in one of his stirrup-leathers, for instance!" suggested John Singular.

"That's a near enough illustration, Doc," quietly added Farquhar. "Not to put too fine a point upon it, the electric trick is played out!"

Brierley shook his head in decided negation.

"Not my new arrangement isn't, gentlemen, and I'm open to lay long odds that you'll say as much after once seeing it put to the test."

"What sort of arrangement is it, then? Spur? Whip? Stirrup?"

At each word the bookmaker shook his head, grimly smiling. And then when Farquhar paused with a thoroughly puzzled air,

he spoke up with far greater briskness than was his custom.

"None of those worn-out devices, gentlemen, but a perfectly fresh invention—and just the grandest thing you ever heard tell of! Why, men, with that same arrangement, fully explained to a cool-headed and trustworthy rider, I can take up a dead horse and make him run true to his old and best form while living; I can, for a scandalous fact, now!"

"Give me Jockey Jap, my rigging, Dandy Pat, a fair day, and I'll bet you two to one that my combination wins the Big Bonanza Stakes!"

## CHAPTER XXI.

### TESTING THE NEW INVENTION.

ALTHOUGH Doc Brierley spoke with so much decision, and with an ardor rather foreign to his natural disposition, there was nothing which savored of boasting about either man or speech.

Ulrich Farquhar was watching him very closely, and he was convinced that if the gaunt bookmaker had not actually come into possession of a fresh marvel, he at least was perfectly sincere in his belief that such was the case.

Even John Singular was led toward that same conclusion, although it was harder for him to admit as much.

With a grim little nod, Brierley viewed his auditors, then added:

"As Mr. Singular said a bit ago, talk's too mighty cheap for any sort of use, and so far he's dead right. The proof of the pudding is in the eating thereof, and so, right here you have it, gentlemen!"

"Drive out to my little place early to morrow morning, and I'll not only show you the new rigging, but we'll have a fair trial of the whole arrangement."

"Not with the Dandy, of course?" asked Farquhar.

"Well, hardly!" with a short, dry chuckle. "Before that comes off, old Hank Ingalls must be converted, and I've got my hands full with you brace of skeptics; don't you reckon so?"

The bookmaker rose to his feet as he spoke, seemingly considering all said that need be spoken on his side of the question. And perhaps that natural assumption of confidence, even if it was more feigned than actually felt, did more toward convincing those same skeptics than a veritable torrent of verbal eloquence.

"In the morning, you say, Doc?" asked Farquhar, likewise rising.

"Yes. Try to get around early, as I'd rather have as few witnesses for the test as might be. You know where: my little place, with the half-mile training track?"

"Of course. I'll be on deck, and I reckon on Jack will not turn up lacking; eh, Singular?"

"Where there's room for two folks, I reckon there's room for three!" gruffly spoke the red-faced member, likewise leaving his chair. "See you both later, gents! Just now—holy smoke! I've got matter for dreaming over that'll last me a solid year to come!"

There were a few words more interchanged, but Ulrich Farquhar made no serious attempt to detain either of the bookmakers, although he had not as yet completely exposed the hand he had resolved to play in the Big Bonanza race.

Still, the strangely confident manner of Doc Brierley, together with his really startling assertions, gave the Track Adonis fresh food for thought, and he was not at all sorry to have a few hours of his own in which he could give that matter sober reflection.

Ulrich Farquhar was astir the next morning at an unusually early hour for him, since he had for many years back been accustomed to burn his candle at the other end; but owlish as he was, the Track Adonis found himself anticipated by John Singular.

That worthy was waiting in front of the house, seated in a neat rig, holding a spirited span of blood bays in easy check; and never being greatly addicted to standing on ceremony, his greeting was characteristic.

"Get a hustle on, 'Richt. Doc will be thinking we've gone back on our bargain, and that would be a precious shame—that

wonderful what is it? You tell, for be darned if I know how!"

Farquhar made a swift gesture of caution, but Singular only laughed.

"Don't you worry, old man! I may be an ass, but I'm not crazy enough to blaat that fact out loud enough for the whole village to hear! And so—pile in, and we'll git that Eli!"

John Singular was proud of his match-team, and justly so, for in a remarkably brief space of time those miles were traversed, and as they turned deftly off the road to approach the "little place" spoken of by the gaunt bookmaker, they were met by Doc Brierley in person.

"Hello! out of the asylum yet, aren't ye?" bluntly greeted the red-faced member, with coarse wit as he drew down his span of spirited beauties. "That's lucky, for we've come all this way to—How'd a weenty touch of your latest wrinkle do to liven up my old plugs, Doc?"

"I wouldn't hurt 'em, much," drily retorted the other, viewing first the horses then their owner, "but you stand in a vast deal more need of it, Jack! And yet—well, tough a subject as you reckon Dandy Pat is, I'd far rather tackle him than—ahem!"

Ulrich Farquhar smiled at this counter, and Singular himself gave a broad, not ill-natured grin. Evidently his long night's rest had acted for the better on his disposition.

Having given back shaft for shot, Brierley resumed his wonted manner, and briefly apologized for acting as hostler himself, saying:

"I thought we'd better keep the test as nearly to ourselves as possible, and so I've shifted all the outside hands for a few hours. Now I'm ready, if you are, gentlemen."

Leaving the team hitched and blanketed under cover, Doc Brierley led the way across the paddock and stable-grounds, making for a broad and comparatively level tract of ground where a regular half-mile track had been laid out for training purposes.

This place was fairly familiar to both Farquhar and Singular, for while Brierley placed his main dependence on bookmaking, he likewise did a little racing under another name, and was generally credited with having one or two "promising youngsters" in reserve for "a hog-killing" whenever "the sign was right!"

As the trio first struck the track, Doc Brierley lifted his rusty-looking old hat with a peculiar gesture, and this signal was quickly answered by the appearance of a single man and blanketed horse, both slowly walking toward that portion of the training-course.

"Part of your combination, Doc?" dryly asked Farquhar as his keen eyes took note of all this.

"Part of it, yes," was the answer. "That's old Mike, my trainer, and giving a secret into his keeping is equal to burying it in a grave!"

"That's your lookout, not ours, of course. What nag is it he's leading, anyway? You've got him blanketed as tenderly as though you knew he was the Bonanza winner, and yet—a cripple on four legs?"

"The dead horse Doc swore he could electrify, of course!" cut in Singular, with a coarse chuckle as that little procession came nearer.

Brierley smiled but said nothing, although the ejaculation of his rival in the betting line really seemed to have some foundation in fact; for the wrinkled old trainer seemed actually dragging the horse after him by the reins, and there was a curious mingling of defiance and shame in his face as he curtly saluted his master's friends.

"Tis here we be, yer ahnner, faith, but—the ould mare hasn't quite weekened up yet! Aisy, be aisy ye fractious filly, ye!"

"Holy smoke!" ejaculated John Singular as he lifted a corner of the blanket, then took a square look into that grizzled face. "It's the old Clay mare, as I'm a sinner!"

Ulrich Farquhar had just as quickly recognized the nearly hidden equine, and now turned a really amazed look upon the gaunt-visaged bookmaker who was quietly standing by.

"Surely your man has made some mistake,

Brierley? You can't mean to make the test with this old ruin?"

"Then Dolly isn't a world-beater, you admit, Mr. Farquhar?"

"She never was that, of course, but a fair oat-winner in her time. But now—why, man, dear, she can't keep on her feet without Mike helps hold her up!"

Brierley laughed softly, rubbing his weather-beaten hands together and evidently enjoying to the limit the little sensation he had been preparing.

"Oh, Dolly isn't nearly so bad off as you try to make out, Farquhar. True, I've turned her out to grass, keeping her on because of what she has done, rather than for what she might yet accomplish. But now—how fast time would you rate her at for a half-mile, gentlemen?"

"Would you mount her on a car, or a stone-boat, first, Doc?" mockingly asked Singular, his face redder than ever through laughter.

"You wouldn't like to give odds on her making the half-mile in much less than a full minute, would you, Jack?"

"Holy smoke! she couldn't make it in less than two minutes on her own feet!" fairly exploded the disgusted bookmaker.

"So you really think, Jack, but listen! When I bid, you count time; if Dolly don't turn the half-mile inside of a minute, I'll forfeit a double case of Mumm's best. If she does, I'll drink, you'll pay!"

"Done! And I wish I was as sure of dying a multi-millionaire!"

Doc Brierley lifted a hand and the wiry little trainer quickly stripped the mare of her blankets, scrambled into the saddle and set off on a "warming-up gallop."

The old creature moved as though stiffened in every joint, and even the confidence betrayed by her owner was not sufficient to convince the two men who so skeptically watched that preliminary canter.

Presently Ulrich Farquhar spoke up:

"If you can get a rate of less than two-twenty out of that old ruin, Brierley, I'll begin to have strong hopes of your combination, including Dandy Pat! But, do you actually mean it, man, dear?"

"I not only mean it, but I mean to prove it even to your complete satisfaction, gentlemen," coolly declared the bookmaker. "Now get your watches ready, for I'll give Mike the word as soon as he comes 'round again."

Moving so stiffly that it was no great stretch of fancy to imagine one could hear her poor old joints creak with each movement, the mare came shambling up to the wire, the eyes of her rider fixed upon his master, no doubt in anticipation of receiving the agreed-upon signal.

"Ready as they pass the wire, gentlemen!" cautioned Brierley, then lifting a hand and beckoning to the rider.

Old Mike steadied his rheumatic mount as they came down for the word, which was lustily given by Brierley as that grizzled head poked its way under the wire as viewed from their station in the little house.

As though that word alone had the power of transformation, Dolly shot forward at really wonderful speed, considering all her movements up to that instant; and as their eyes followed her flying shape around the first turn, into the straight stretch, both Farquhar and Singular stared in open-eyed amazement, the change was so marvelous.

The mare seemed to have won back her palmiest youth, and was racing low and level, her rheumatic limbs moving like perfectly adjusted machinery, and the quarter-mile was made so quickly that both men gave another gasp of astonishment.

"Look, now!" cried Brierley as he suddenly flirled forth a brilliant-hued silk handkerchief just as the quarter-post was passed. "Mike's giving her the full charge now!"

Its effect was instantly perceptible, too, and the electrified mare fairly flew around the upper turn and down the home-stretch, thundering under the taut wire like an equine thunderbolt!

"Fifty-four flat, I make it, gentlemen; how are you with me?" asked Brierley, with a grim smile on his face as he put up his watch.

"To a dot, but—holy smoke! To just think what—Look at the mare, Doc!"

"The full charge was too much for her, I reckon, but it's converted you," said Brier-

ley, hurrying down the narrow steps to the track.

As they gained this, they saw the poor old mare stagger and fall to the ground, dying almost without a struggle.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE SPORTING DETECTIVE IN DEMAND.

"HERE you are, my hearty!" said Miles Honeyman, pausing in front of a tall office-building, looking upward as though to view the precise apartment whither they were then due by appointment. "Put a brace on, man, dear, else the fair Gale will blow you clean out of the country!"

Clifford Carpenter made a wry grimace at this jest, but did not consider it worth further notice.

Still, it was with a pulse which throbbed a goodly bit faster than the normal rate that the Plunger mounted to the floor on which the firm of McBride & Stowell, lawyers and dealers in real estate, had their chambers, although it was not because of encountering those named parties.

As was to be expected, the Plunger felt a strong and growing interest in the young lady who had so opportunely appeared to give important evidence in the Mayo Preston case.

Without that evidence, he almost surely would have been bound over for trial on the charge of murder, since he could not have proven an *alibi*, which alone would counterbalance the artfully-concocted evidence going to fasten suspicion upon his head.

Gerva Gale had vanished from the courtroom before Carpenter got a chance to render thanks, and though he lost little time in seeking to procure an interview, up to the present hour he had been wholly unsuccessful.

The law firm which employed the young lady as stenographer and type-writer would not supply the lacking address without first gaining permission from Miss Gale, and that was out of the question just then; the intense strain to which she had been subjected had resulted in illness, and until then—and so forth!

But on this morning a note had been brought by messenger to the Plunger, and as Miles Honeyman was in his company at the time, the Sporting Detective was unceremoniously conscripted for the trip.

That note begged Mr. Carpenter to call at his earliest convenience, when he would be given information of importance.

Upon entering the chambers, Carpenter presented that note as the speediest method of introduction, and when the cordial greeting given him was over, he turned to introduce his companion; but Mr. McBride gave a dry smile as he explained:

"That is hardly necessary, my dear sir, since I have had the pleasure of Mr. Honeyman's acquaintance for some little length of time."

"Not in the way of legal business, though, praises be!" fervently murmured the follower of the races, with a glance upward. "I'm none too lucky, as a rule, but I've steered clear of that awful reef, so far!"

"Just an old jest of his, sir," blandly explained the senior member of the firm, with an indulgent smile toward the offender. "But for once I am delighted to see you here, Mr. Honeyman, for—"

"Good angels deliver us!" came that subdued murmur again.

"For there is a little matter of business which may as well be attended to this day," quietly finished the lawyer; then turning more squarely upon the other caller, he added: "You wish to secure an interview with Miss Gerva Gale, I understand, sir?"

"I do, yes," bowed the Plunger. "For one thing, I owe that lady a heavy debt of gratitude, and though thanks form a mighty poor medium for payment, it's the best I can do along that line. Then—you have gained permission for me to call, sir?"

The lawyer bowed gravely.

"Yes. Miss Gale has been quite ill, and is not yet strong enough to resume her regular duties in connection with this office."

"I am very sorry. I'm afraid part of her nervous sufferings are to be attributed to my unfortunate affair, but—is there no more substantial amends I can make, Mr. McBride?"

The Plunger flushed a bit as he put this question, but his eyes met that keen, half-

suspicious gaze with honest frankness. The lawyer's brow lightened a bit as he saw this, and he quickly spoke:

"That is one reason why I requested you to drop in here, sir, instead of sending you the address direct. Now—you have never met Miss Gale, I believe?"

"No, sir. To my knowledge I never even saw her until last—that day in court! But I saw enough then to make me want to see more!"

"Pretty good for a modest starter!" softly murmured Honeyman.

"Miss Gale is a lady by birth, by nature, and by training, Mr. Carpenter," gravely added the old lawyer. "If you agree to visit her with the perfect understanding that she is a lady, and is to be treated as such, I will give you her address. Otherwise—never!"

"There's my hand, and my word of honor goes with it, Mr. McBride," the Plunger said, earnestly. "And now I'll tell you what I meant to keep back until after paying this visit and judging the young lady for myself: I honestly believe she and I will turn out to be blood-relatives!"

"What are you in earnest, Mr. Carpenter?"

The Plunger smiled as he took a seat, now more nearly at his ease than he had seemed since first sighting that huge office-building.

"I'm merely asserting my honest belief, sir, not absolutely claiming relationship, observe. But—Gerva is a name which has run through my race for hundreds of years, and I am almost certain this Gerva Gale will prove to be a relative long since lost sight of."

"Yet Miss Gale is only a girl, sir!"

"Beg pardon, sir, but I mean that she comes of a branch of the Carpenter tree which I had almost forgotten ever existed. I might never have recalled that fact, only for hearing the name 'Gerva' under such peculiar circumstances."

Clifford Carpenter spoke with a gravity unusual for him, and Miles Honeyman deemed it a friendly part to effect a bit of a diversion right then and there.

This he inaugurated by drawing forth his watch and giving a sharp whistle as of surprise; then rising to his feet, he spoke:

"Beg your pardon, Mr. McBride, but it's later than I fancied, and—did I understand you to say that you had a matter of importance to broach for my delectation, sir?"

"You are in haste, then? If Mr. Carpenter will excuse me?"

"I can very well wait, Mr. McBride," quickly responded the Plunger, though there was something of surprise in the look which he directed toward the Sporting Detective.

If Miles Honeyman saw that, he made no sign, but blandly bowed to the old lawyer as he waited for him to speak.

After fumbling for a few seconds at his desk, the lawyer looked up to say:

"First, Mr. Honeyman, are you at liberty to accept an engagement in which you are at liberty to fix your own salary?"

"Of what nature might be the work, first?"

"Well, you can judge as to that for yourself, when I tell you that a certain lady—whose name and address I have here on this card," with a brief glance downward at the bit of pasteboard which he had found in his desk. "That a certain lady feels deeply interested in this Mayo Preston case, and begged me to recommend a thoroughly trustworthy detective who would consent to work under her instructions."

Miles Honeyman frowned a bit as he listened to this glibly uttered explanation, looking at that card as though his doubts might possibly be settled one way or the other by a fair squint at those printed characters.

"What lady do you mean, Mr. McBride?" he asked, after a brief pause.

"You will find her name and address given here, sir," answered the lawyer, reaching forth the card, which Honeyman lost no time in taking full possession of.

A glance at those dainty characters, then the Sporting Detective slipped the card into a vest-pocket, saying tersely:

"I'll drop in on the lady, at all events."

and then we can decide as to the rest. Luckily it's right on my way to—but I'll be late for my appointment if I don't get a hustle on! See you later, Cliff. Yours to command, McBride!"

The Sporting Detective took his departure like one in hot haste, and then the lawyer turned once more to the Plunger.

"Of course I can lay no claim to authority over Miss Gale, sir, but she has been in our employ for more than two years, and I have learned to respect and honor her, as a true lady. So—if you think to pay your debt to Miss Gerva by offering her money—she'd reject it, and scorn you as no gentleman for daring to so underestimate her, sir!"

Lawyer McBride was in deep earnest, now, and Carpenter took him for just what he meant.

"I never even thought of so canceling the heavy debt I am owing her, sir, but if it proves to be as I now more than suspect: if it turns out to be that Miss Gale is really a cousin, she will be my nearest of kin, and surely there can be no harm or shame in my offering to at least share a portion of my fortune with her?"

"Your cousin! Your legal heir?" ejaculated the lawyer, interest upon his tones and visible upon his face. "Surely—But enough for now, sir," he said as he handed the Plunger a card upon which an address was penciled. "Here is the address you desired, and Miss Gale said she would be willing to receive you this evening, at any time after eight and before ten o'clock."

Carpenter gave hearty thanks for the favor, and promising to drop in on the morrow to report as to that believed relationship, he took his departure, hurrying down to the street-level without waiting for the elevator.

As his feet touched the pave, a hand was deftly thrust through his arm, and a well-known voice entered his ear:

"I've been waiting for you, pardner: I had to rack out in a precious hurry, as you saw, but—well, I wasn't in so big a hurry but that I could wait a bit. I want you to help me pay that visit—see?"

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### A JEALOUS WOMAN'S ACCUSATION.

As he spoke these words Miles Honeyman held forth the card which Lawyer McBride had given him, and Clifford Carpenter gave a low ejaculation as he read the name printed thereon.

"The Oriole, is it?"

"Claudine Vaughn, no less!" assented the Sporting Detective. "Think of my enlisting to wear her colors, lad! The orange and black!" added Honeyman, with a low chuckle at the sudden whimsy.

"Wouldn't it prove a paying spec if you were to adopt both colors and owner, Miles?" half seriously suggested the Plunger. "The little widow may be just a trifle skittish, but that's easy cured when a trainer knows how, and surely the purse is heavy enough?"

"Not for Joseph, my dear lad," and the Sporting Detective shook his head in firm negation. "Not but that I'm fairly well satisfied the widow has always run straight and honest, but—what did McBride say?"

"About her taking an interest in the Preston affair?"

Honeyman nodded quickly, now thoroughly grave as he added:

"Just that! And I happen to know that Claudine Vaughn was growing to think the world of poor Mayo, so—you'll bear me company, Cliff?"

"Why should I, though?" asked the Plunger, hanging a little back. "It is you she wants, and I'd not only be in the way but might prevent your driving a paying bargain; don't you see, Miles?"

Instead of replying in words, Honeyman signed to a hack which drew briskly up at the curb, and almost before the Plunger knew what was being done, he was hustled into the vehicle, Miles followed after, and a word the driver carried them off at a brisk trot.

Carpenter frowned at this action, and showed his disapproval by saying:

"I'd rather not go with you, Miles, for a fact! Somehow it gives me the cold shivers just to think of—another time, then?"

But a restraining hand closed upon the

arm which reached forth to open the door, and the Sporting Detective spoke seriously:

"I'll give you my reasons later, Cliff, but just now I want your company the worst kind. Go it blind for a few minutes, can't you, old man? Just to oblige me, then?"

Carpenter raised no further objections, although his grave face plainly betrayed his reluctance to join in this call upon the dashing young widow whose almost regal turnout at the races had led up to her being dubbed "The Oriole."

For one reason, it had been by her carriage that Carpenter found himself so savagely assaulted by Mayo Preston just after Dixie so oddly lost the important race she had already good as placed to her credit.

Claudine Vaughn was the woman who so agitatedly appealed to the ruined gambler—who begged him for her sake to refrain—and the Plunger had not seen her since that memorable afternoon.

With a willing team and a good driver, space is rapidly devoured, and almost before Clifford Carpenter could nerve himself for what he instinctively felt would prove a far from agreeable ordeal for both parties, the residence named was reached, and they were awaiting admittance, Honeyman giving his friend no chance to break away.

Five minutes later they were being greeted by the fair widow, who at first seemed embarrassed and ill at ease; but when Honeyman explained to her the real meaning of that uncereemonious call, showing that Lawyer McBride had sent them to his fair client, the widow immediately grew interested, although the presence of Clifford Carpenter past doubt lent her an unusual degree of embarrassment.

The Plunger fell into the background, leaving his companion to manage matters as best he could. Miles proved himself fully equal to that task, and by his smooth tongue, his easy tact, ere long placed Mrs. Vaughn wholly at her ease.

Satisfied at length that she could do no better than to trust her caller wholly, Claudine at once took the plunge, by saying:

"I'm not the richest woman in town, Mr. Honeyman, but I stand ready to pay over a fortune to the man who solves the mystery surrounding the—the sad fate of—of Mr. Preston! And—Can I trust you wholly, sir?"

"I think you may, ma'am," was the grave response. "As a solid friend to Carpenter, yonder, who became so unfortunately involved in the sad affair, I'm more than anxious to bring the inside facts to light."

The widow hesitated for a brief period, flushing and paling in alternation; but then her gleaming black eyes lifted to that grave countenance, and she spoke swiftly:

"I had what I considered good and sufficient reasons for thinking my friend—for he was a very dear friend, sir!" her voice breaking a bit, but then quickly steadied to add: "I thought Mr. Preston was being shamefully betrayed just where he might feel it the most acutely; and so I sent him a word of warning that day—the day, sir!"

"Yes?" offered the Sporting Detective, hardly ready as yet to venture a more leading question.

"It concerned a—a woman, sir! I wrote a note, but—I hardly liked to sign my name to it; and so—well, my messenger surely delivered that note, though I have only his word for it! For—Heaven pity me! I sent Mayo Preston straight to meet his awful doom!"

Her voice choked and her face drooped to meet her trembling hands. Sobs shook her elegant figure, and the two men interchanged swift looks of strong curiosity and growing interest.

Could it be that through this woman they were on the point of solving the black mystery so far enshrouding the death of Mayo Preston?

Mrs. Vaughn rallied quickly, and then, seemingly reckless how plainly she might be betraying her intense interest in the ruined gambler, since she had already let fall the clue, she spoke on:

"I sent that anonymous warning by a man whom I had hired several times to serve me at the race-course. I can't say just how he delivered the note, for I warned him against letting Mr. Preston track him back to me; but that it was delivered, just as the

man assured me when he came for my pay, I have not the slightest doubt!"

"Then you think that note had something to do with his going out to Forest Park that night, ma'am?" asked the Sporting Detective.

"I am afraid so—I know so, in fact!" with an effort choking back her emotions. "I'd give my fortune—I'd give my very life if I had never written that fatal note! But—Heaven knows I meant it all for the best—for his own good!"

"May I ask why you wrote, ma'am? That is—well, what was the subject matter of warning?"

"Why, do you ask?" and her emotion suddenly turned to almost vicious anger and hatred. "Because I knew that woman was lying to him! Because I knew she was playing with him as a cat plays with a mouse! Because I knew that if he could see her just once as she really was, he'd never again dishonor his eyes by looking her way!"

Intense emotions choked her voice, but the detective maintained silence. He was shrewd enough to see that the widow was only too anxious now to tell all she knew, in hopes of bringing punishment upon the head of her once favored rival.

"That woman was fooling Mayo to the top of his bent! She was robbing him with both hands, and smiling in his face just to hold fast her prey—Satan make her bed for it all!"

Those white hands flew up in a wild gesture as though their owner meant to appeal to Satan's antipodes, and noticing signs of coming hysterics, Miles Honeyman deemed it wisest to crack the nut as quickly as might be, lest he miss the richest kernel of all.

"And this woman, Mrs. Vaughn? Shall I try to guess her name, or will you spare me that trouble?"

"Swear first that you'll show her no mercy, sir! Swear that you'll hunt her down to the very gallows if this awful deed really lies at her door!" impetuously cried the half-distracted widow.

"I swear to probe the case to the very bottom, ma'am, and if this woman you suspect is concerned in the killing of Mayo Preston, I pledge you my word as man and as detective, to bring her before the bar of justice for her fitting reward," gravely assured Honeyman.

"Thanks! And there shall be no lack of money, for I'll make that my part of the contract. And the woman is—Eloise Houghton!"

Contrary to her evident expectation the detective betrayed no particular emotion or surprise at that name, but calmly making a note in his book, Honeyman added:

"Did Preston expect to meet or to find this woman in the Park?"

"Yes! I know that she has regular rendezvous there at least twice a week! And—I told him as much! Oh, if I had not—Cursed be the hand that wrote that wretched warning!"

Miles Honeyman rose to his feet with more haste than grace, for those dread hysterics seemed coming perilously nigh, just then, and he preferred being out of short-range when the feminine circus opened.

Crisply advising Mrs. Vaughn not to let her suspicions spread any further, and assuring her that he would drop in again before long, to give her an account of his own movements as well as to question her a bit more closely concerning her suspicions, he managed to take his leave before that menacing storm should burst.

Clifford Carpenter had played a very insignificant part in that abbreviated interview, but his face betrayed no faint interest as the two friends gained the street once more.

First giving a swift look around to make sure no other person was within earshot, he gravely declared:

"I believe she's right, Miles! I've always thought the Queen had a finger in that nasty affair!"

"Well, I reckon there's more in this than usually found in a case of mad jealousy, pardner," slowly returned the Sporting Detective. "And I do more than half-believe Eloise Houghton could name the man who shot Mayo Preston!"

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### AN EVENING CALL, AND SOMETHING MORE.

The big clock in the court-house dome was tolling the hour of eight as Clifford Carpenter, "dressed up to the very nines," and looking something more than the everyday follower of the races, approached the building where, according to the penciled address given him by Lawyer McBride, Miss Gerva Gale was a boarder.

Under that unusually trig and trim get-up, was a bit of nervousness such as the daring Plunger rarely experienced, even though the coming few seconds was to prove him winner or loser of a modest fortune, as had so often been the case with him in his turf career.

But this was different! Then he had only men and money to deal with, but now—a fair young lady, to whom he owed a vast debt of gratitude!

"And only for her coming just as she did. I might now be—Ugh!"

That reflection seemed to lend the Plunger the touch of courage he had temporarily lost, and turning back he swiftly approached the house past which his unwonted nervousness had impelled his footsteps.

Even then he took note of the fact which Gerva had mentioned while giving in her volunteer testimony: the front of the respectable looking brick building was cast into the dark, owing to the absence of all street lamps.

His ring was speedily answered by a trim-looking maid, and on asking for Miss Gale, he was admitted to the house, his card being taken to the young lady while he waited in the parlor.

That waiting was not unduly prolonged, and almost before he had completed an inventory of his surroundings, the door opened to admit a more than pleasing vision: Gerva Gale, still pale from her brief illness, but with the rose softly suffusing her fair cheeks as her eyes drooped before that swift glow of honest admiration.

From that moment Clifford Carpenter forgot his nervousness, his almost dread of meeting face to face this maiden to whom he owed so vast a debt of gratitude.

And, too, oddly though it might have sounded had he put the thought into actual words, from that instant Clifford Carpenter became a convert to the rare old saying that it is not good for man to live alone!

Fortunately, however, he managed to keep this from being too plainly written upon his face, and though Miss Gale seemed just a little surprised if not overcome by the unexpected warmth of his greeting, Carpenter soon found himself seated near that charming young lady, talking with fluent yet earnest tongue.

Very likely it would have bothered either maid or man to recall in just what terms that sincere gratitude was couched, but Clifford certainly did thank Gerva, and Gerva assuredly did accept those thanks just as though she liked to hear them so shaped!

There were a great many points upon which Carpenter had determined to touch, as a sort of religious duty; but now that he found himself in company so much more agreeable than he had calculated upon, nearly all of those cut-and-dried resolutions went by the board.

Still, he did not feel at any loss what to say. Rather the contrary in fact; he hardly knew what point to touch upon first, and for some little time he skipped from one to another, without clearing up any one of those still misty facts.

There was one point on which Carpenter now felt an intense curiosity, although he dared not openly ask for enlightenment, or even to shape a hint that way: why had the masked assassin taken so much trouble and run so great a risk to decoy Gerva Gale away from her friends?

On her side the maiden seemed a little more embarrassed than her visitor, and though more than sufficient chance was given for a frank explanation of that puzzling point, provided she herself knew or could guess at the actual cause, those thanks for her opportunity appearance and valuable evidence before the court were gotten over without any such opening being improved.

Then abandoning his faint hopes on that score for the present at least, Cliff Car-

penter spoke of that old family name, and with it as an excuse, questioned the young lady rather closely as to her family and her past record.

Evidently Gerva had nothing to conceal, for she spoke frankly, giving a sketch of the past as concerned her parents, and in a very brief space of time Clifford Carpenter grew fairly well convinced his sudden notion was based on solid facts: this was indeed a blood relative!

Not until he had gleaned pretty much all the maiden could tell him did Carpenter let aught of his actual personal reasons leak out, but then, with a low, half-merry, half-serious laugh, he said:

"Do you know, Miss Gale, you made a very grave mistake in not keeping away from that court-room!"

Gerva flushed vividly as her big brown eyes met his quizzical orbs, and she stammered a little as she tried to reply:

"I don't—I'm sure—A mistake, sir?"

"A most fortunate one for poor me, but for you—Let me tell you, Miss Gerva, if fate had kept you away from that scene, letting me fight my own battles to the bitter end—"

"I wish—Pray don't talk like that, sir!" half indignantly interposed the maiden, her red lips quivering and her bright eyes dimming.

"Surely a cousin may indulge in his little joke, Gerva?" asked the Plunger, with a broadening smile as he leaned forward to take one of her hands between his.

That little hand was swiftly jerked away, and with a flush of proud indignation Gerva sprang to her feet as though about to take flight.

Clifford was alarmed, yet pleased. The first because he feared the chance for explanation would be denied him, the last because it proved past doubt his instinctive belief that Gerva was a true and a pure woman, above even a passing flirtation such as this might well seem.

"For your mother was my father's half-sister!" the Plunger hastily declared, as the surest method of retrieving his too hasty move. "Please be seated, Miss Gale, and I pledge you my honor to prove all I now say!"

For a little the maiden seemed too greatly amazed to fully realize how much that assertion might mean, if duly substantiated; but then, by a few well-chosen sentences which convinced her he meant naught save her own good, Gerva resumed her former position.

Then Clifford Carpenter rapidly but clearly told his part of the past and nearly forgotten record; and little by little it became fairly certain that he had made no mistake in believing this girl to be a cousin by blood, although by no means too near a relative.

For, oddly enough in one who had up to this, the completion of his first quarter of a century, fought shy of all womankind so far as connected with the state of wedlock or even of courtship, Clifford seemed determined to make Gerva comprehend their exact degree of relationship.

That was close enough to insure their being the best of friends, on the most intimate terms, yet by no means such as would—ahem!

And as he somewhat clumsily shifted his helm to avoid that risky reef, Carpenter was mentally wondering just how that curling brown head would look under a filmy veil and a wreath of orange blossoms!

Having established their relationship to his perfect satisfaction, Clifford reverted to that past jest, saying with an odd smile lighting up his florid but better than handsome face:

"And that's what I meant, Gerva, when you took offense; if you hadn't come to the rescue, and I had been forced to dree my weird, do you know how much better off the world in general would call you? A million or two, at the very lowest estimate, Gerva!"

"I don't—it isn't a pleasant jest, cousin!" murmured the maiden.

"Not a bit so jest, my dear cousin, but the solid truth. For you are my only living relative, so far as my knowledge goes! And, at all events, you are my nearest blood relative. So here I passed out of this world, as it might easily have proved only for your com-

ing, dear!—why, you would have fallen heiress to all my property!"

Carpenter laughed at this, as though he rather enjoyed the fact, but it shocked the maiden severely. And that, added to her recent illness from which her overtired nerves had not yet entirely rallied, caused her to look so poorly that Carpenter grew frightened.

"I wonder if—That terrible man!" Gerva huskily panted, one hand pressing tightly over her heart, the other rising to her now painfully-throbbing temples. "I meant to tell—not now! If you would—ah!"

Sorely frightened Carpenter ran for assistance, and the landlady quickly put in an appearance, and after a few words of explanation she assured the Plunger there was no real cause for alarm, but begged him to take his departure for that evening.

"It is only a bit overdoing, sir, and Gerva will be all right after a sound night's rest. So—good evening, sir!"

With a faint smile Gerva roused to clasp his hand and ask her new found cousin to call in the morning, then Cliff Carpenter made his way out of the house, moving and acting almost as a man in a waking dream.

Like many another and wiser man, the Plunger had laughed at the mere notion of falling in love; but now—how else could his odd, strange emotions be interpreted?

The fair face of Gerva Gale was ever before his eyes, and he could hear her gentle voice, her low, musical laugh; he could see her big brown eyes filled with emotion, and take note again of her perfectly molded figure!

All this as he moved along through that by no means too brilliantly-lighted portion of the town, neither knowing nor caring whether his footsteps were tending; and had nothing occurred to interrupt his blind progress, Clifford Carpenter might have walked clear through the big city.

But then, as he turned a corner where there was no street lamp, dark shapes leaped forth from ambush and assaulted him viciously, giving the Plunger not even the ghost of a chance to defend himself!

## CHAPTER XXV.

### JOCKEY JAP'S LITTLE EXPEDITION.

WITHOUT preliminary sound or slightest warning, came that vicious assault, and a heavy blow on one side of the head sent the athletic Plunger reeling; then, barely an instant later a human shape struck him in a wild beast-like leap, driving home a knife with murderous fury!

That double shock proved too much for the assaulted man, and he fell awkwardly, trying to shout aloud for help but finding his voice almost entirely shut off by the closure of an arm around his throat.

He went down in a reeling flounder, blinded by blows, turning deathly sick under the knife, yet even then his instinct guided his good right hand in a measure, and as his form struck the ground, Cliff Carpenter had out his revolver and was working the trigger spasmodically.

The darkness which had at first favored the thugs, now worked against them, for he of the murderous "life preserver" was forced to hold his hand, or else to strike blindly, and that might be dangerous to more than the Plunger.

For his mate in evil was clinging viciously to their victim, one wiry arm choking off those hoarse cries, his other hand tugging at the weapon whose long blade had become fixed in bone or in muscle, and while Carpenter was falling, defied his fierce efforts to jerk it free for yet other deadly strokes.

Then it was that the revolver began to bark, and though it was but the blind rally of a rapidly-failing man, who hardly knew what his own hand was doing, those loud reports were far-reaching, those ruddy spouts of flame seemed like calcium lights, and those bullets—

As the first shot came, the knifer jerked his weapon free, then sent the blade home again with a snarling curse which almost surely would have betrayed his personality to the Plunger had that poor fellow been in anything like his normal condition.

"Give him another, mate!" cried that venomous thug as he drove his bloody blade into that quivering mass for the second time.

"Mash in his cursed skull, and then—rack out, boy! He's got it—got it for keeps this time, curse him!"

He of the knife jumped back as he spoke, for one of those blindly-directed shots fairly scorched his waist, but he saw his mate deal yet another cruel blow upon that defenseless head, and something in the sound caused him to fairly howl with savage joy.

"Hook your lucky, mate! He's got his dose, for sure! Hook it, or the bloody cops'll be on our backs!"

Without pausing to take note whether his partner in that dastardly affair followed this advice or not, Jockey Jap turned and sped away from the spot, doubling the corner like a hunted fox, running at top speed, yet leaving no more echo behind him than if he was shod in velvet.

That barking pistol was silent now, and the malicious little ape almost suffocated with the devilish mirth which he was constrained to hold within bounds.

He pictured the form of his once master as it now lay: covered with blood from thrust and blow, powerless as so much clay!

He felt that 'twould be better than a feast if he might only dance in impish triumph around and over that now harmless giant! If he might only spit upon the proud face whose stern frown he had so often cowered under!

To kick, to trample, to wipe his feet upon that body! Ah, why couldn't a fellow have all his heart might ask for in this world?

But not for an instant did Jockey Jap slacken in his flight, knowing only too well that those blind shots would alarm the police, and fetch assistance in a hurry.

"Too late to do him any good, though! And—dead men tell no tales!" snarlingly exulted the little demon as he plunged into a dark alley, thus avoiding him whom he could now hear hurrying that way.

Crouching there in utter darkness the assassin peered out of the alley-mouth, making a mocking gesture as he caught a glimpse of a uniformed shape hurrying by.

"Go it, Big-boots!" he softly breathed to complete that pantomime. "There's near two hundred pounds of cold meat awaiting ye, but—it's a sort o' game you'll find a mighty sight more bother than profit! Go it, ye flat hooved cripples! Ha! ha! ha!"

Shaking a fist in the direction the officer had taken, Jockey Jap waited a few seconds longer to bend his keen ear in listening; then, although he could hear naught to indicate that other policemen were coming from that same direction, he stole cautiously yet rapidly through that alley, evidently considering that avenue of flight to be the least hazardous just then.

Pausing at the further mouth long enough to make sure no human being was dangerously nigh that point, the assassin emerged from the alley, striding briskly along through the night, evidently in haste to gain the goal he now had in view.

Although he had not covered so great a stretch of ground as yet, he failed to hear aught from the scene of that dastardly assault, and the human ape chuckled to himself as he hurried onward.

"Too mighty dead for howling over, or else they haven't found him yet! Great guns! If I only dared turn back for a square look at the hound! If I only might—ugh! I'd dance a clog all over his face, and give myself away to a dead moral!"

Jockey Jap hurried onward through the night, heading more directly now for the house where Ulrich Farquhar reigned supreme, and in a second-story chamber of which the rider had been consigned, more of a prisoner than a guest of honor!

Now that he had fairly won clear of that danger-line, and knew that he might pass through a crowd without awakening suspicion, Jockey Jap used a little less caution than he had deemed advisable at first.

Still, he slackened his pace and kept well under the shadows as he drew nearer to that building, his every sense upon the keen alert, his wits mustered in order to befriend their owner in case his little expedition should have been discovered by that new and more than stern master, Ulrich Farquhar.

Those shuttered and curtained windows on the ground floor gave forth barely a suspi-

cion of light, yet Jockey Jap felt fully convinced that the occupants were awake and upon the alert.

"Blame the odds, though, just so he don't tumble to my little racket before I'm ready to show up—if ever!" mumbled the human ape to himself as he stole silently into the rear yard.

Crouching close to the rear wall of the building, Jockey Jap listened for a full minute, stilling his breath the better to catch every outside sound.

Then and then only was the wary little knave fairly convinced that no one was on the alert nigh him, and that no cunning trap had been spread since his flitting, to catch him on his return.

Taking off the rubber-soled tennis-shoes which had enabled him to walk or run without making much more noise than any other beast of cat or ape kind, Jockey Jap tied them together and slung them at his belt, behind his back.

Then he stole in sock-feet to the corner of the house, where a substantial water-pipe came down to meet the tiling which formed a further conduit to the cistern in the rear, and for the last time listening for sounds which he surely had no real wish to catch, the human ape gripped that painted spout and nimbly began his upward climb!

It was a feat which few men could have performed at all, and fewer still with such ease and lack of noise; but Jockey Jap was a genius in his way, and this was only one of his odd accomplishments.

A dozen feet from the ground this pipe branched, one portion going directly up to the eaves, the other crossing the rear wall at a gentle angle to join the guttering on the opposite side of the roof.

Pausing only a few seconds to relieve his cramping fingers, Jockey Jap boldly moved along this nearly horizontal stretch, showing no fear, no hesitation, although the guttering bent and creaked faintly under his weight, and a fall from there to earth could hardly fail to result in broken bones or fractured vertebra!

But Jockey Jap had carefully canvassed the situation before he decided upon that little expedition, and as that hollow bridge had safely upheld him once since the shades of night fell over the Mound City, he confidently relied upon it to prove equally trustworthy now.

At length the race course acrobat paused, the spouting leading him directly under a window-sill, and with his grip shifted to the solid stone, the jockey could afford to catch his breath at last!

But Deagle did not waste many seconds, for he was aware that, even now, peril might be hanging over his head; and lifting himself upward far enough to do the rest of his work, Jap pushed up the window which he had left unfastened for that very purpose, then slid in through the opening, standing still as a statue of marble as his feet touched that floor.

Not a sound came to confirm his suspicions, and then he crept noiselessly forward, to make sure all was indeed well with him that night.

He opened his wide mouth in a silent laugh, as he saw that the trap he had placed close to the door had not been disturbed: no one could possibly have opened that door, or crossed that threshold without knocking down his cunning fabrication: and that was still intact!

Turning the gas a bit higher, then, Jockey Jap proceeded to wash all trace of blood from his hands and face, then took off the "jumper" and high-waisted overalls which he had donned for the express purpose of both disguising his person and protecting his garments.

Hiding these for the present, he made perfectly sure that no marks of human blood were visible on person or clothes, then gave free vent to his diabolical triumph, chuckling, grimacing, dancing like a veritable imp.

"Ah-ha, ye overgrown bully! I swore I'd do ye up for it all, and now—sup with the devill!" he exulted as his mad but silent dance went on.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### ALTERING THEIR TACTICS.

JOCKEY JAP had made one little miscalculation that night, although it was an error

which could hardly have given to him serious uneasiness.

Ulrich Farquhar was not at home during the hours consumed by his reluctant guest in that little expedition, but was seated only a few feet from Eloise Houghton, talking over the situation as it had now become altered.

For him, Ulrich Farquhar seemed unusually grave and earnest, and there was little to be seen of that almost habitual sneer and smile in blending, just then.

Almost as a matter of course the two schemers had been discussing the Carpenter affairs, and while Farquhar had said very little concerning his more recent changes of ground, he had been fairly open and above board for him.

Then, equally as a matter of course, their talk shifted to the abduction of Gerva Gale, and the secret motives which led up to that bold and audacious bit of work.

As she had done once before, the dashing young widow seemed inclined to cast all the blame for that worse than fiasco upon her confederate, paying no heed to the actual facts while asserting her steady but fruitless opposition to the intricate scheme.

"And now, even yet you can't get your crazy fancy off that girl!"

"I'm not so mighty sure I want to get it off, Queen," coolly retorted her confederate, with a half-sneer which faded away as quickly as it came. "And—such a woman as that for a wife might make a man out of a far worse devil than you take pleasure in saying I am, Eloise!"

Mrs. Houghton laughed, lowly, but with a sneer in her tones that sent a faint flush into that face opposite her.

"Don't you flatter yourself that highly, Adonis! You're long past the mending stage, and the woman who could make an angel out of such material— Bah! you make me weary, Ulrich!"

Instead of making hot retort as might have been expected, Farquhar slowly nodded his head like one assenting to a proposition past denying, however much he might wish matters stood otherwise.

"I reckon you're pretty near right, Queen," he muttered, after a brief pause. "It's hard work teaching an old dog new tricks, and my time for—that is—"

"Lally-gagging, 'Rich!"

The widow laughed spitefully, and her ally nodded in return as he coolly retorted:

"You're far more familiar with such matters than I am, and lally-gagging goes, on your authority!"

"Tit for tat, and the tally-sheet balances! Now, 'Rich, quit chaffing and get down to solid business. What's the next best move?"

"Well, I really reckon we'll have to drop that notion of marrying the little tempest, sugary morsel though that would be!"

"Why such an abrupt change of tune, Adonis?"

"For one thing, we could hardly work such another trick, but the most important reason of all is just this: Cliff Carpenter has made the same discovery which set us on edge after Gerva Gale!"

"Do you really mean it, Ulrich?"

"Or I wouldn't be wasting breath in telling you so, Queen. Of course it all came through her chipping in that morning at the examination; may Satan entertain the fellow who helped her off, that night!"

"You haven't found out who that was, Adonis?"

"No, worse luck!"

"Isn't it queer we haven't heard from him, though?"

"That's just what troubles me the most!" declared Farquhar with a dark scowl such as very seldom wrinkled his smooth brows. "Who could it have been? How did he get there? And—since he did chip, why hasn't he crowded his winning-streak?"

"Laying back for a bigger stake, maybe. And yet—it's looking dubious for our little fortune, Adonis!"

"There'll be blood on the face of the moon before I lose that, you may depend on't, Queen!" coldly asserted the track-speculator; then with an entire change of tone he added: "Let that point drop for future consideration, Queenie."

"As you please, Adonis. Now—what else?"

"I was about to tell you just why I thought we'd better let that idea of marrying a prospective heiress fall through, Eloise."

"Carpenter has been asking the firm Gerva Gale works for, all about the girl, and though I'm only making a blind guess at so much, I'm feeling fairly confident that he's on the road to falling over head and heels in love with her too!"

"Just like a man! Fools—all fools, the very best of you! And that best is poor enough, heaven knows!"

Farquhar smiled quietly at this characteristic outburst, but let it pass without further notice.

"I hardly think he's secured a personal interview with the girl, as yet, for I've had him shadowed night and day; but that is sure to come ere long, and then—well, Carpenter is a good ways from being the fool you call him, Queenie, and the odds say he'll discover her relationship, even if he hasn't done so already."

"And if he should do both?"

"Judge for yourself, Queen! You know what Carpenter is: soft as putty in a certain sense of the word! If he learns that Gerva is indeed his nearest living relative, it's long odds he not only tells her so, but that he shapes a will to correspond!"

"How do you know that he has been trying to secure an interview with the girl, Ulrich?"

"That's certain enough, Queen. A clerk in McBride & Stowell's office is under such obligations to me that he follows the slightest beck of my finger. And so—I know that the firm has promised to make known the Plunger's wish to the young lady."

"Then there wouldn't be any use in your approaching the girl in your own face, eh, Adonis?"

Farquhar frowned a bit at this, but made no denial.

"Because riches make beauty, and Carpenter can count his millions! And so—I wonder—"

The widow sprung to her feet and crossed the room, there to slowly turn from side to side as she studied the reflection there in the mirror. And a smile gradually came into her face as she took a final survey of those reflected charms, then swung around to face her friend.

"What is your opinion, Adonis? Shall I forge to the front? Shall I try my hand at insinuating this pigeon with golden plumage, Ulrich?"

"You!" ejaculated the man, his gaze slowly sweeping up and down that figure, striking enough yet hardly that of an angel, either in beauty or innocence.

Eloise frowned, stamping her slippered foot viciously.

"Out with it, man! Shall I try my hand?"

"No earthly good, Queen!"

That glow of anger turned to a lightning flash, and for a brief space the woman resembled a fury more than aught else.

But Ulrich Farquhar never flinched, gazing coldly into her flushed face, his mustache curling with a blending of amusement and scorn.

"You know it just as well as I do, Queen, so where's the sense in kicking over the traces in that fashion? Haven't you already tried your level best to bridle the plug? And hasn't he just as often given you the slip, kicking up his heels as he trotted off to fresher, sweeter and greener pasture?"

In spite of herself the woman was forced to smile at that odd choice of words, and resuming the seat from which vanity had driven her, Eloise asked in more placable tones:

"Well, since I can't suit you, 'Rich, say you the word! What comes next on the programme, then?"

"What we're after, and what we both want more than anything else, is the filthy lucre, Queenie. And so long as we can get our hands in the Plunger's coffers, I'll clear up to the elbows, dye mind, too! I don't know as we've any fair license to runable at anything else. Do you, partner?"

"Isn't there a mighty big little 'if' lying in the woodpile, somewhere, Adonis?" shrewdly asked the woman.

"Well, of course there is a certain amount of risk to be run," admitted the handi-

schemer. "He's a rank idiot who expects to win a dollar without risking a cent. But the way matters are shaping themselves just now, I wouldn't mind laying just such long odds that we'll turn the trick, and that means—listen, Queen!—that means our winning just what the Plunger loses: and that will be his whole fortune!"

Farquhar spoke in warm earnestness, but in spite of all that, a look of skepticism rested upon the face of his confederate.

"Another case of premature chicken-enumeration, for rocks!" she murmured, in a theatrical aside. "Old enough to know better, too!"

"Get rid of your mocks and ridicule now, Queen, for in another week you'll have no earthly use for them. And, ten to one, you'll be vowing I was the skeptic, you the one of boundless faith!"

"If so, you'll not forget to remind me of it, 'Rich! Now—what is this tremendous secret, anyway? Surely I've a right to know it all?'

"It's not so mighty much of a secret, Queen, after all," said the other schemer, with a low, amused chuckle. "Boiled down, it comes to just this: if we play our cards aright, we'll break the Plunger all up in business, and that by simply turning the Big Bonanza into a hog-killing!"

"You know that Cliff Carpenter will go his last dollar on his entry winning the race, of course?"

"And rightly, too! Nothing in the race can begin to push Dixie!"

"Bar one: and that one is—Dandy Pat!"

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### THE SPORTING DETECTIVE'S OATH.

MILES HONEYMAN had just given in his order for breakfast, and took up a morning paper to leisurely glance over the news items by way of killing time while waiting; but he had scarcely turned to the local page than a low, fierce ejaculation broke from his lips.

There it was: a brief item so far as length went, but containing so much of intense interest to the thousands who knew "Plunger" Carpenter, either as one in private life, or as a public character known to all who frequented the turf or course for profit on for pleasure alone.

Only a few lines, because the paper was going to press when the ever-alert reporter caught the thrilling word; little more than a bald statement of facts: that Clifford Carpenter had been picked up by the police, badly wounded by thugs who had made a murderous assault upon him, presumably for the purpose of plunder.

Just this, with the addition of the hospital to which the unfortunate horseman had been conveyed, until the precise nature of his injuries could be ascertained.

Miles Honeyman waited for nothing more, but snatched up his hat and fled from the restaurant at a pace which, had he been less thoroughly known to proprietor and head-waiter, might well have caused a hue and cry on bare suspicion.

So it came to pass that the Sporting Detective was an unusually early caller at the hospital, and thanks to his fairly intimate acquaintance with one of the surgeons in charge, he found slight difficulty in securing admission to the casualty ward.

Until then he had hoped for the best; had hoped this would turn out to be another instance of mistaken identity: but there was no room left for doubting after his first swift question to the surgeon.

"Yes, it's the Plunger, Honeyman," came the grave response. "And while I've seen worse cases mend, I'd be lying to you if I didn't add that I've seen less serious injuries end in a graveyard!"

"How did it happen? And where?" asked the detective, after a brief silence, during which his heavy blond mustaches served their master well in making a quivering lip.

"The police picked him up, but that's pretty much all I can tell you, for now. Of course the record will be properly filled out to-day, but it hasn't been done yet. I was off-duty last night, and so—you would like to see him, of course?"

"He isn't—if it wouldn't do him any harm, doctor?" hesitatingly spoke the

surgeon, looking and acting strangely irresolute for one of his past record.

With a slight shake of his head the surgeon led the way into the casualty ward, and pausing near a cot which was partitioned off from view of its fellows, drew a bit aside in order to permit a fairer view to the pale-faced detective.

"The poor fellow hasn't wholly rallied, as yet," the surgeon said as Honeyman slowly bent over that motionless shape. "He has been terribly battered about the head, but we have found only a slight fracture, as yet. If there is nothing worse—and the fever can be kept under control—well, time alone can tell!"

Miles Honeyman caught his breath sharply as he gazed into that strangely pale face, already so greatly altered from the one he recalled of only a few short hours before: then the face of a man in the prime of early manhood and flush of perfect health; now the picture of death!

He saw that other hurts had been received than the blows spoken of by the surgeon, for there were faint marks of blood upon the bandaged chest; and with one unsteady finger pointing them out, his troubled eyes asked the question his tongue could hardly be trusted to utter.

"Yes, he was stabbed, in addition to the blows upon his head," gravely admitted the physician. "There were two separate wounds, both apparently made by the same weapon. And, rather oddly, there was yet another ugly-looking cut, evidently received several days ago."

Although this was hardly put as a query, there was a rising inflection to those closing words which, added to the keen glance of those eyes, surely betokened no slight curiosity on the part of the surgeon.

But Miles Honeyman neither saw the one nor noticed the other. He was gazing through misty eyes upon his friend lying there so still and quiet, and even with all that proof before him, he found it almost impossible to credit the sad truth: that the Plunger had surely fallen before the devilish plots of his bitter enemies!

Then word came that the surgeon was needed at once in another ward, and bidding Honeyman use his own judgment about lingering, since it was highly improbable that the patient would rouse up for hours to come, the man of scalpel and graduate hurried off on velvet-shod feet.

For several minutes the Sporting Detective stood motionless there by the cot-side, his usually keen eyes grown so misty that he could hardly recognize the face which he had learned to more than like of recent months.

If he would only stir! If he would only utter a word, to show that he still clung to life! If—surely he was not—breathing?

It seemed as though the warm blood was curdling in his veins as this awful doubt so suddenly assailed Miles Honeyman, and with a low, rasping cry the detective stooped lower, bending an ear in listening, at the same time lowering hand to that bandaged bosom.

His breath came quickly once more, for he could hear, he could feel, and now that he knew Clifford Carpenter still lived, Miles Honeyman looked more his usual self.

A single flashing glance around assured him he was alone with the patient, and then, his right hand still resting lightly over that true and honest heart, the Sporting Detective breathed an oath which he would keep even at the cost of his own life.

"I've acted like a fool in letting those devils run free-footed so long, but now—hear me, Clifford Carpenter! If you die, they shall pull hemp—by the Eternal!"

Then, as though placing a seal upon that crisp oath, Miles Honeyman bent lower, just touching that massive forehead with his mustached lips, then rose erect, taking one long regretful look at his unconscious friend before leaving him to his fate.

Miles Honeyman passed out of that ward without encountering any one whom he knew, and left the hospital itself without seeing the surgeon.

He left no word behind him, for he intended keeping himself fully posted as to the progress made by the Plunger, and that without depending entirely upon the memory of

The Sporting Detective signaled a cab and gave orders to be driven to the Central Station, not because time was so very precious to him just then, but in part at least because he felt so powerfully shaken by this latest blow.

He knew he had not yet regained his self-control, and the thought of meeting everyday acquaintances, who would almost surely have something to say about the startling tidings, was far from agreeable.

It did not take long to cover the distance lying between those two points, but Miles Honeyman put the minutes to the best possible use, and so far as outward seeming went, he was once more himself when he alighted in front of the gloomy-fronted station, discharging cabby and then crossing the threshold which, to so many criminals, had proved to be the portal to the Penitentiary.

Here, too, the Sporting Detective found little difficulty in securing the interview he desired, for when his card was passed on to the chief of police, word came back without delay that he might enter.

After that brief but cordial greeting was over, Honeyman cut no time to waste, and was soon listening intently to the history of the Carpenter case, as far as developed.

That consumed scant time: merely the fact that, startled by the sounds of pistol-firing, the policemen had found Clifford Carpenter lying partly in the gutter, like one dead, but still with revolver tight-gripped in his right hand.

Nothing whatever was seen or heard of his assailants, although the police came hurrying with all possible speed to the spot from the four quarters.

The Plunger was alone, no person had been met by any of the officers on the way, and during the first few minutes of hurried investigation it bade fair to prove yet another of the long list of unsolvable tragedies which so greatly mar the record of each great city.

"There was no clue left then, chief?" asked the Sporting Detective at this finish. "We've got to begin all in the dark?"

Before answering the official swung around to his desk, taking from one of the pigeon-holes an article wrapped in paper and labeled, but the wording of which even Honeyman's keen eyes failed to catch.

Removing the paper, a weapon was revealed, such as usually bears the misnomer of "life-preserver;" a ball of lead, a whalebone handle, both of which were covered with finely plaited leather, a stout loop of the same being attached to the other end of the handle.

The chief of police slipped this loop over hand to wrist, then made a swift posture as though striking an enemy; a grimly significant pantomime, surely!

"This was picked up close to where the Plunger lay, Honeyman," he said, passing the weapon over for closer inspection. "Looks like a favorite companion, don't it? Well, smaller proofs than that same has led a crook to the spring-trap, and this may do the same thing!"

The Sporting Detective examined that dastard's weapon in silence, and passed it back without remark. Then he shortly after took his departure, giving as excuse for haste that he had an appointment to keep.

"That tells whose hand dealt the blows, but whose head and brain lies back of it all?" the detective muttered as he passed out of the Station.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### GIVING DANDY PAT A TRIAL.

IT was the morning of the second day following the dastardly assault upon Clifford Carpenter, that a particularly select party was early astir, on most important business.

Ulrich Farquhar and Eloise Houghton had ridden forth from the city while the stars were still atwinkle in the clear vault of heaven, and at the first rays of dawn they turned in at the "little place" owned by Dcc Brierley, the bookmaker and the racing man.

They took this ride in order to meet an appointment made with several other interested parties, prominent among whom now loomed up a tall and gangling native of the Ozark, known throughout Western racing circles as Old Hank Ingalls, "a poor 'un to look at, but a rare 'un to go!"

Hanging a bit aloof, still inclined to skepticism in spite of the remarkable exhibition given a day or two earlier by Dolly, the worn-out old mare, was John Singular, who formed the last of that select coterie.

Old Hank Ingalls, owner of Dandy Pat, had been won over sufficiently far to agree to a trial of the new invention on his entry for the Big Bonanza, shrewdly deeming it better to grasp a bird in hand than wait for the vague chance of catching a brace in the bush.

So confident was Doc Brierley of proving to the satisfaction of all that he had indeed caught on to a "mighty good thing," that he unhesitatingly agreed to pay Ingalls his price; and now all those interested in that prospective "hog-killing" were assembled for the express purpose of thoroughly testing the electric saddle on the horse they would have to depend on for bringing off their mighty *coup*.

After the brief greetings which met the latest couple to arrive were over with, Old Hank Ingalls drily observed:

"Waal, I don't reckon ye'll ever hev a smarter chaisee then right now, Doc! Fer ef that's the stuff in your new rig that you're tryin' to make out, Dandy Pat's in rare fettle jest this holy minnit!"

"In one of his Sunday-school humors, eh, Ingalls?" asked Farquhar.

"Waal, don't you think it, sir! Ef there ever was a durned, bull-headed, contrary critter on fo' laigs, it's Dandy Pat! An' he's jest a holy terror this mornin'; I kin see it in the ball-eye of 'im!"

"Then you'd hardly bet your life on him leading the ruck over the Bonanza distance, Ingalls?" coolly asked Brierley, as the party moved on toward the track, where the horse in question was being slowly walked up and down the stretch by Mike, the old trainer and ex-jockey.

"He wouldn't lead a foundered cow ef that wasn't anything faster on the track, but he'd stick close to the tail-eend of chain-lightnin' wroppe up in hoss-hide," grimly averred the Ozarkian. "Lead? Ef the critter Pat was tailin' off was to drap down dead, the durn brute wouldn't take the lead; not ef a train o' keers was hitched to his head!"

"Yet you've entered him in the Big Bonanza, sir?" ventured Eloise.

"Jest to win a bit o' oat-money through Pat's losin', ma'am, ye see," answered Ingalls, with a shrewd wag of his long head.

By this time the track was reached, and Brierley passed on a bit in advance of the other members of the party, speaking a few words to his trainer in a low whisper.

Coming back, he spoke more particularly to the owner of that brute.

"I told you I'd pay in advance, Ingalls, to cover all chance of accidents in this trial. You don't object to my calling Farquhar and Jack as witnesses, of course?"

"Never a bit of it! Why should I? It's jest solid business."

"Here's the cash, then," passing a roll of bills over to the Missourian, who rapidly counted it, then shoved the money deep into a pocket. "And that is to pay for Dandy Pat if I fail to return him to you in as good condition as he stands this minute."

"An' the boodle comes back your way ef my hoss isn't hurt," curtly added the other. "You kin be jedges, gents."

"Thanks! And now I reckon we'd best get down to solid business."

As he spoke, Brierley left them again, going over to see Dandy Pat stripped of his blankets, and to give a careful inspection of the saddle before that preliminary trial was made.

This done to his own satisfaction, Brierley put a metal dog call to his lips and blew a shrill blast, which was instantly responded to by a dashily-garbed, active figure springing forth from the dark recesses under the judges' stand, and almost before the owner of Dandy Pat could put full faith in the evidence of his own eyesight, Jockey Jap was lifted to the saddle by the strong hand of Brierley; then Trainer Mike released the reins, giving the "Little Demon" full control of his new mount.

"Warm him up a bit, Jap!" cried the master, as the bony but speedy-built gelding began to snort and toss his ugly head, even

so soon fighting against the bit and for his own will. "Don't go too close to the other jock, but let Pat see them, and know what's coming. Now—off!"

Brierley hurried back to the stand, bounding up the narrow stairs with boyish activity, his deep sunken eyes glowing redly there in the gray dawn.

"You've got the Jap up, I see," grunted Ingalls, chewing vigorously at his "black navy" the while. "He's mighty nigh as tricky as Pat, an' when you ram the couple into one combination—stan' from under!"

"It's a combination which will carry off the Big Bonanza, though," quietly asserted the Track Adonis, as he closely followed the movements of horse and rider, paying no attention to the brace of stable-boys who were in readiness to make the pace for the Dandy, mounted on a couple of Brierley's best three-year-olds.

"Seein's b'lievin', an' I hain't done that till yit!" grimly retorted the native of the Ozarks. "Ef you're tryin' to warm Pat up, better hitch him all fo' eends an' kin'le a fire under him, Doc!"

"Give him time, Hank; give him time, for right there you've got a world-beater!" placidly retorted Brierley; but he changed his manner, as he could see no improvement in the conduct of that sulky brute.

Dandy Pat was occupying the full course, plunging from side to side and sawing at the bit, making savage lunges with head and neck which nearly dragged Jockey Jap out of the saddle. He paid no attention whatever to the whip or the spur, and so Brierley gave the signal which was promptly obeyed; Dandy Pat whirling around with a vicious lurch, the two three-year-olds getting off in fine style, the trio thundering down to the wire at a rare pace, head and head so even was the start.

"Go!" fairly yelled Brierley as the trio came to the score, and the jockeys bent over to their work, all having orders to "ride from end to end!"

"There's your sulking tailer, Ingalls!" exclaimed Farquhar as Dandy Pat easily drew away from the other horses as they rounded the first turn; but then the grim old Missourian cut in with the words:

"I'm a-knownin' of jest that, boss! An' how do you like it, eh?"

For, just as though realizing that he was running a race, the incorrigible brute flung up his head and tucked down his tail, then fell back far enough to resign the lead, and that too while Jockey Jap was riding the best he knew how, making his whip whistle viciously while his keen spurs brought blood at each and every sulking stride!

But all this work was of no avail. Dandy Pat hung close to the rear of the leader, but not one foot would he gain, much less pass by his willing rivals!

Jockey Jap pulled him out clear to the railing, and tried all he knew to make the brute go to the front; but he was for once confronted by as entire a brute as himself, and the best he could do was to follow close to the leading horse clear around to the wire.

As they came down the stretch, Old Hank yelled forth, savagely:

"Push him, ye imp! Make him lead or tear him to fiddle-strings!"

All could see that Jockey Jap was doing his level best, and surely was not sparing his mount in the least; but, nothing could avail; and the rest of that heat was but a continuation of the first half-mile: Dandy Pat hanging close behind his horse, and paying not the slightest attention to either steel or whalebone.

"Whar's yer winnin' combination now, gents?" derisively cried out Old Hank Ingalls, as the horses passed under the wire for the second time.

"Right therel!" answered Farquhar, with pointing finger. "And now to prove it, Brierley!"

#### CHAPTER XXIX.

##### ELECTRIFYING A BRUTE.

OLD HANK INGALLS gave another sneering chuckle as the party left the stand for the track, and it was plainly to be seen that he was an even greater skeptic than John Singular had been at the outset.

"Doc's paid fer the use o' the blamed critter, an' so ye kin putt in all o' yer spar'

time 'sperimentin' with Pat; but ef ye reckon to git ary mo' out o' the old hoss then you hev got—Waal, what's that so dug-gun funny, I want to know?"

He broke off irritably as Farquhar laughed in his face with a degree of amusement such as the Track Adonis rarely exhibited openly.

"Why, do you ask, my dear fellow?" and a white hand closed gently upon one of his almost fleshless arms. "Because we've just been letting Dandy Pat show himself as he is, so far, and—

"Then the 'dope' hain't bin—"

"Has not been administered as yet, no," blandly answered Farquhar, as they drew near to where Jockey Jap was trying to reach a better understanding with that unyielding brute, while Trainer Mike was blanketing and otherwise attending to Dandy Pat's needs.

Looking and acting very much as though he considered himself a victim of a new sort of confidence game, Ingalls slowly moved around his horse, chewing vigorously at his enormous quid as he took note of those long wales showing through the damp hair, and of the bleeding spots where Jockey Jap had used the steel.

"Looks as though we'd given him a genuine trial, don't it, Ingalls?" asked Brierley, and a motion of his hand sent jockey and trainer off with the animal, keeping him in motion as a preventive against stiff limbs or sore muscles. "And now, having shown you that Pat is himself and nothing better, we'll follow it up by showing you the Big Bonanza winner!"

"Ef sayin' was doin'. I wouldn't be down yer squarmishin' fer oat-money," drily observed the Ozarkian. "How soon fu'st?"

"Oh, we're going strictly according to rule, ye know, Ingalls, and will give Pat the regulation rest. As for my colts—"

"Whar's the use? Send out ary ole cow, Doc, an' it'll give ye jest as much race fer yer good money," grimly chuckled the skeptic. "Thar's now an' then a day when Pat fergits the cussed tricks he's larnt, but this hain't one o' them long come shorties—not much!"

Not one of those present needed any explanation of this or of other sentences tending to the same fact, for they had followed the turf so long and so intelligently that very few of its points had escaped their notice; but a word further of explanation may not come amiss to some of those whose eyes pass over these lines.

As a colt, Dandy Pat had been one of the most promising candidates for turf honors of his time, and his fame spread swiftly. At the end of his first season he was worth a fortune. At the termination of his second, "money couldn't begin to touch him!"

But then the avaricious tactics which his owner pursued ruined the horse for reliable work, and Dandy Pat took to "running cunning," in track parlance.

He had grown sick of the business, and knew that, win or lose, 'twas all the same to himself. In either case he was cruelly punished while the race was on, and whether he won or lost, his rations never altered nor his rewards increased.

To refuse to run at all would bring still worse punishment, so Dandy Pat, like many another promising horse, would only make a pretense of racing; until, growing thoroughly confirmed in his cunning, the brute would "tail the leader" as his really wonderful turn of speed permitted him to do at will; but nothing whatever could force him into the lead.

"Onless the cussed critter ketches onto me layin' out my pile on him to lose!" Old Hank Ingalls would sometimes say. "An' then a ghost couldn't lead him ary one rod o' the course—dug-gun him!"

Something of this was brought forward to help pass away that interval of waiting, the final minutes of which were utilized by Doc Brierley and Ulrich Farquhar giving Jockey Jap his last instructions.

Then the starting-bell was rung to fetch forth the horses, and once more the track presented an animated appearance, though on a small scale.

Dandy Pat seemed even more fractious now than he had been at the outset, and Old Hank Ingalls grimly smiled as his lantern-jaws worked with renewed vigor.

"He's a-comin', gents! Don't ye fool yourselves a-thinkin' he hain't, nyther! Dandy Pat'll break that monkey critter's fool' neck ef he don't give in a mite fer to let the brute hev his own way!"

Little or no attention was paid to this characteristic prophecy, for now that the crucial moment was drawing near, one and all of those more deeply interested were wrought up to a strain so intense that idle speech seemed among the impossibilities.

Sternly resolved to carry all out in strict accordance with the racing rules, Doc Brierley gave the horses full time by his watch, but then uttered the signal for Trainer Mike to get them off in good shape.

Dandy Pat showed his cunning even more plainly now, and it was only after half a dozen false starts that Brierley yelled forth the word "Go!" as they came thundering under the wire.

Now, just as in the first heat, Dandy Pat shot to the front before a score of rods had been covered after receiving the word; but, though Ingalls had his jaws parted for the derisive whoop and laugh, his horse did not "come back," but kept on, "running like a ghost" and leaving his well-bred competitors at every stride!

"Just look at him, will you?" huskily exploded Ulrich Farquhar. "Who would believe it the same cunning brute who—Look at him, now!"

Ingalls was looking for all his eyes were worth, too intensely astonished for words. Never in the past had he seen Dandy Pat run more like a genuine "world-beater" than right now! And—would it last? How long before the brute would sulk, and take to "tailing" again?

Not in the first half mile, which he led from end to end; not in the second, where he was leading the three year-olds by a full distance.

And then, as Jockey Jap looked up as he neared the wire for further instructions, Doc Brierley held aloft his rusty hat, and from that instant the "Little Demon" settled down in his saddle and began to ride as though a king's ransom hung trembling in the balance.

"We'll make it the Bonanza distance!" cried Brierley, in explanation, his right hand clasping his split-second timer, but his glowing eyes following that flying racer. "That's my combination, gentlemen!"

Riding strictly in accordance with their instructions, the two other jockeys spared not whip nor spur, but they were far in the rear when Dandy Pat flashed under the wire at that truly marvelous pace!

Wildly excited, for it seemed certain now that they held a fortune under their control, the party hurried down to the track, where Dandy Pat was being stripped of his racing equipage, and with hardly a second look at the horse who had done such wonders, they gathered around that saddle.

To all appearance it was an ordinary racing saddle, and cunning old hand though he was, Ingalls failed to detect the secret of that wonder-working until Brierley explained, clearly.

The battery was hidden in the saddle itself, and was worked at will by the jockey. Under the pommel lay a bit of copper, looking like an ornament, but by pulling this out a bit the connection was made and the electric shock administered. By drawing the hook out a full inch the extreme effect was given, then the current shut off by simply pushing the bit of copper back into its original position.

This, briefly stated, was all the explanation given, but with the marvelous effects still so vivid before their minds, it was easy enough for all present to comprehend what a wonderful combination the gaunt bookmaker had got hold of!

With their burning curiosity far from satisfied, the little group was interrupted by the sound of horse's feet, and as they lifted eyes that way, they saw a rider coming swiftly across to the course.

Ulrich Farquhar gave a sharp ejaculation, then hurried to meet the messenger, snatching from his hand an envelope. After tearing it open he turned that way with a clear, ringing, yet vicious laugh before saying:

"Prepare to weep, friends, for—Cliff Carpenter died last night!"

### CHAPTER XXX.

#### THE BIG BONANZA DAY.

The day of the big race dawned somewhat inauspiciously, the heavens being heavily overcast with clouds which promised far more rain than any running horse not emphatically a "mud lark" would care for.

But, this had little effect on the excitement which had been so rarely fostered from day to day by the thousand-and-one wild rumors set afloat, some through honest error, some maliciously, some with an eye single to affecting the betting odds, but all supplying a portion of that mental pabulum without which our people would grow stagnated.

Among other intensely exciting canards had been that report of the Plunger's death, which obtained full credence for three long and busy days, during which many a veteran bettor got his books sadly tangled up in his natural desire to "hedge" as the only possible chance to come anywhere nigh playing even on the Big Bonanza.

For, of course, the death of Clifford Carpenter would cancel all his entries, in the Big Bonanza as well as the minor stakes and purses. And with Dixie out, the great race seemed a decidedly "open" one.

Then this report was denied, at first vaguely, but soon with a greater show of authority; although, up to this very morning precious few of the many thousands whom that enigma bothered, could have given fair reasons for their belief either in life or in death.

Those who held that Carpenter was living, pointed to the fact that Dixie still showed unscratched on the list of starters in the Bonanza; and though the little mare had receded from her position of actual favorite against the field, she was still an important factor in the betting, with money coming forward in steadily-increasing quantities as the hour for ringing up the horses drew nearer.

On the other hand, it was shown how surely the Plunger must have gone over the last score, for Dixie was no longer to be found at the course, and Carpenter's red head no longer formed a beacon in the betting-ring.

Then, too, the "inside ring" was quietly but persistently backing Dandy Pat for honors; and now that the all important day had dawned, so many commissioners were eager to put money upon the noted brute that they actually frightened off the majority of speculators.

Surely there was "something rotten in Denmark!" And, so reasoning, the lesser fry scuttled out to shallower waters, letting the big fish have the channel, and as a result Dandy Pat arose from long odds against, to an even favorite with Dixie!

Now then came another startling change, and like wildfire the report flashed throughout that vast assembly: Clifford Carpenter, so far from being dead, was here at the course, genially smiling and greeting his friends as of yore!

If that resurrection brought joy to his friends, it certainly produced little less than consternation in the camp of his enemies!

Not until he had seen Carpenter with his own eyes, would Ulrich Farquhar credit that absurdly sensational canard; and he hurried over to the Ingalls stables to nerve up Jockey Jap and see that he did not endanger the complete success of the "Brierley Combination" through his superstitious dread of this man, whose life was surely charmed against his vicious blade!

"It's all a lie, hatched up expressly to give their side a chance to cover their losses by hedging, Jap," asserted the sport, and for the moment he firmly believed he was uttering nothing more than the simple truth.

He had looked for the Plunger, but failed to find him. He had found scores of others just as eager in their quest, but not one to whom he put the question could say more than he already knew: there was a widespread rumor that Clifford Carpenter was not only alive, but that he had come to the track expressly to witness the crowning triumph of his superb little mare!

"Where is he, if really living and here?" asked Farquhar, irritably, as he took note of that scared look in the treacherous eyes of his jockey, Jasper Deagle. "Don't let that canard worry you, Jap, for there's a fortune

for you when you drive Dandy Pat under the wire—a winner!"

Almost countless were the questions which showered upon the judges before the horses were rung from their stables for the Big Bonanza; but to one and all came the same response.

"We have received no regular notice of Mr. Carpenter's death. His entries are regularly made, and must stand in lack of such notification. We are here to decide what takes place before us, and nothing else."

And yet, surely so much money would not be in sight to back Dixie at any reasonable odds, without those who served being fully assured of a race for their investments?

Taking all things into consideration, then, this day promised to be one of more than usual note in racing annals.

Doc Brierley and his other converts, including Hank Ingalls, who was half crazed by the wondrous prospects that so suddenly and so unexpectedly opened up before him, all felt so sure of their carefully-planned "hog killing" that they paid little attention to the floating rumors, but buckled down to sober business, making hay before their bold confidence should frighten off the bookmakers and other betting men.

"What's the odds?" bluntly asked Brierley as John Singular came to him, all in a flutter. "We've got the winning combination, anyway, and for my part I'd just glory in having the Plunger see his brag mare go down in defeat before our despised Dandy!"

So the betting-ring contained even more than its usual quota of yelling, howling, crowding lunatics on this occasion, and to the cool-headed, critical observer by no means formed the least interesting portion of that magnificent panorama.

Now the bell from the judges' stand was rung, summoning the horses for the initial race on that day's programme, and shortly after the "bobtails" came into view, some with the regular jockeys up, others taking their preliminary canter with black or white stable-boy in the pig-skin.

Very slight show of interest was taken in that irregular parade for the first few minutes, even for owners or backers; for at that precise moment a fine turn-out wheeled into position in a space which had with no little difficulty been reserved for it near the Grand Stand, and after a bit there went up a welcoming yell from scores of lusty lungs. And—

Clifford Carpenter, the Plunger, rose to his feet in the barouche, doffing hat and bowing with a genial smile in acknowledgment of that welcome back to his favorite stamping-grounds!

True, he looked pale and wan, in startling contrast to his customary appearance, while his head showed a neat bandage as that glossy tie was lifted; but there could no longer remain a doubt as to the Plunger being very much alive!

This acknowledgment given, Carpenter resumed his seat, smiling cordially as his big blue eyes bent upon the slightly but most becomingly flushed face at his side—the face which he, for the first time, saw in the courtroom where he was standing charged with murder!

On the other seat were Lawyer McBride and his good wife, both looking as though they were out to enjoy themselves, and deemed it a sacred duty not to waste any minutes in beginning their rare treat!

Through the opening races fully as much attention was paid the Plunger as to the horses; then as the call from stables rung forth from the judges' stand, even he was forgotten by nearly all in that burning interest attached to the great race of both day and meeting.

Curiously enough, perhaps, if chance had all to do with it, a neatly-appointed rig drew close beside the barouche in which the Carpenter party sat, and though the Plunger never so much as cast a glance that way at their coming, he knew the dashing young widow, Eloise Houghton, was mistress of that gay turnout.

The horses starting for the Big Bonanza formed in line and slowly paraded up and down the stretch before the Grand Stand, giving all present an opportunity to scan their favorites and change or confirm their faith to match.

And looking more ape-like than ever, if possible, Jockey Jap was up on Dandy Pat!

## CHAPTER XXXI.

## JOCKEY JAP'S DOUBLE-CROSS.

"A THOUSAND flat that Dandy Pat shows Dixie the way under the wire!"

Clear and musical the voice, showing no strain to lungs, but for all that rising above the mingling roar of a thousand voices.

The call came from an open landau close beside the carriage in which the Plunger was seated as he watched that gay parade of horses and riders; but, though he knew right well who uttered the challenge, and that it was couched especially for his ear, Clifford Carpenter made no sign, speaking to his fair companion as though he held but a passing interest in aught else.

But if those ears paid no heed, another pair did, and a cheery voice called forth in answer:

"Done, my lady! It's a good bet if I lose, for are we not all in honor bound to pay tribute to the Queen?"

As he spoke thus, Miles Honeyman not only pressed closer to that carriage, but, with a laughing apology for his sublime impudence, actually entered the landau, like one willing to chance a rebuff for the opportunity of gaining a fairer view of the parade!

"Barring yourself, sir," quickly added the Queen of the Turf, flushing a bit deeper at that intrusion, yet making no effort to hinder the Sporting Detective from assuming that station. "It's Dandy Pat against Dixie—a woman against a curl! One thousand flat that Dandy Pat beats Dixie from end to end!"

Still no notice was taken by the man to ward whom that taunt was so viciously flung; and then, as the parade ended, and the riders began to gallop their horses, even Eloise Houghton lost sight of all else for the moment, standing erect upon the cushioned seat, a hand leaning for support on Honeyman's shoulder, her glasses steadily holding focus on the ugly brute expected to trail the Carpenter colors in the dust that day.

There was little time cut to waste after the starting-bell sounded, for the starting-judge had been given his orders, and he quickly made the different jockeys understand that he meant strict business.

Still, the field for that rich stake was so large that he found it "no fool of a job" to get the lot off evenly, and for fully half an hour the vast assemblage was held at high tension by the false starts.

The distance to be run was the full mile and one-half, and as the finish was to be at the stand, of course the starting had to take place across the field, at the half-mile post.

Then the killing strain was slackened as hundreds of voices united in that same cry:

"They're off!"

Like a descending bolt flashed the flag of the starter, and then the body of eager horses and no less ardent jockeys sped onward the now brightly beaming sun reflecting in rainbow hues from those gaudy jackets and caps.

Around the upper turn into the long and straight home-stretch came that flying mass, even so quickly beginning to lengthen and break up into little squads as the faster or less controllable animals forged to the front.

And prominent among the names called forth by wild-eyed partisans was that of the confirmed sulker, Dandy Pat!

Many of those then present could remember how often that same animal had led his field with just such seeming ease in those palmy days gone by; but now—how long would he forget to sulk?

"Dandy Pat takes race and purse!" shrilly cried the Queen of the Turf as the horses came thundering down the stretch, that gelding fully two lengths ahead of his nearest competitor. "Dandy Pat first, the rest nowhere!"

Jockey Jap was grinning like an ape as he flashed under the wire, crouching far forward, his silken jacket bulging out like a balloon at his rounded back.

To those who saw him now, it looked as though he was resolved to leave no room for doubting the result—that this would be no repetition of the race which Dixie had lost through his over-carelessness.

As the lower turn was rounded for the second time, it could be seen that Dandy Pat was a little more than holding his own: there was now nearly three lengths of clear daylight between his bang-tail and the extended nose of The White Ghost.

Dixie was gradually crawling up through the ruck, and before the half was reached, she showed neck and neck with the Ghost, both running true to form and game from tip to tip.

But few indeed were the eyes which took note of any other save the sensation of the day: Dandy Pat!

What miraculous change had been wrought in that brute? His Satanic temper, his obstinate cunning, his sulky indifference to steel and whale-bone: how had he been cured of all those?

For now he was running true to his two and three-year form, when his appearance for a purse or stake seemed little less than a guarantee for its winning.

The usual roar grew tenfold more intense now, although many a stout-hearted bettor there turned sick at heart and found his eyes grow blind as certain ruin stared full in the face!

Then—

"Look at him! Dandy sulks! Dandy is—another cross, by the Great Scott!"

The racers were at the three-quarter pole, now, with Dandy Pat in the lead, Dixie fairly trailing him, the White Ghost obstinately hanging on at her saddle-girth, while the field was practically out of the race so far as winning was concerned.

But, then, all at once the leader threw up his bony head! And still worse—his bang-tail flirted upward, with the motion which all horsemen are only too quick to recognize: 'twas the flag of distress, the signal of defeat!

Those thousands of eyes saw this, and then they saw Jockey Jap bringing his whip-hand into play, and knew just as surely that his spurs were beginning to taste hot blood!

Oh, how that roar did swell and roll until it grew almost deafening! Oh, how intense grew the excitement now!

"He's sulking! Dandy Pat's out of it, now!"

"A lie! He's not—cuss that crook!" hoarsely screamed a tall, gaunt figure clad in a limp and dirty duster, with wildly gyrating arms. "It's a cross—a double cross!"

Still, fierce though those passions raged, custom prevailed, and the wild uproar died away as the racers came into the home-stretch, that rich purse now fairly in sight for the winner.

And that winner was—

"Dixie! Dixie wins!"

Closely hugging the inner rail came the noble little mare, her rider sitting low down, eyes turned over his right shoulder as he watched his only competitor, now, whip and spurs ready to call upon the mare for a fresh link of speed in case of necessity.

But, the White Ghost could do no more; and so the race was lost and won, Dixie just showing daylight between as the wire was passed for the last time.

And Dandy Pat came hammering down the stretch, plainly sulking, showing dogged indifference to those vicious whip-strokes, dropping blood on either side where the spurs were still at work, Jockey Jap pale as the traditional ghost, but riding for all he knew how!

Then there was a wild rush of human life out upon the track, and once again a perfect Babel reigned supreme, amid which the savage oaths and curses of the defeated schemers was lost like a rain-drop in an ocean!

Then—there sounded a pistol-shot!

Instantly all eyes were turned in that direction, and the gaunt shape of Old Hank Ingalls was seen as he held to the head of Dandy Pat with one hand, its mate thrusting revolver against the swaying shape of Jockey Jap!

A second shot, then the horse whirled half-way around, rearing up, to fall or be jerked over sideways, when all went down in a little cloud of dust together!

## CHAPTER XXXII.

## THE CRUSH, THE CRASH AND THE CRISIS!

THERR was a tremendous rush in that direction as soon as the real or seeming tragedy could be divined, but the track police knew their duty and performed it to perfection, considering what an extraordinary gathering they had to manage.

They found Old Hank Ingalls pinned beneath the body of Dandy Pat, terribly crushed yet with sufficient life and consciousness left to savagely gasp his reasons for such a fierce action:

"Double-cross, curse him! Sold us—all—twicet over!"

The horse was found to be crippled, with a broken hip, where that second shot had entered, diverted from its human target by the furious plunging of Dandy Pat. And, to finish with the noted brute once for all, it may be stated right here that another shot was fired, and then a span of work-mules dragged the dead hero forever off the track!

Jockey Jap had manged to throw himself clear of the rest when the upset came, but he was lying past helping himself, a thin, bloody froth tinging his blanching lips with each breath he drew.

Medical aid was not lacking, and the decision in both cases was that little could be done for the injured men. They might be moved from where they lay—that could do no great harm, now!

Those grave words told it all, and in another minute the truth was flashed throughout all that vast assemblage: Jockey Jap had thrown his last race, and Old Hank Ingalls would not long survive his no less notorious entry, Dandy Pat!

Not all who witnessed that totally unexpected defeat, who caught a glimpse of that tragedy of the track, waited to witness the ending.

Miles Honeyman sprung from that landau to take part in the rush, and his place was quickly filled by the Track Adonis, Ulrich Farquhar, looking ghastly pale and at least a score years older than he had only a few fleeting seconds earlier.

Rapid movement was altogether out of the question in such a jam; but, as quickly as possible, the spirited span was turned and the defeated schemers headed for the main entrance, knowing that ere long the harpies would pounce down upon them in fierce earnest!

"A double-cross! A double-cross!"

Those words fell at brief intervals from the blanched lips of Ulrich Farquhar, who, plainly enough, was stunned by the blow. And when their team was rudely halted a short distance from the gates, he stared like one too utterly dazed for comprehension.

Miles Honeyman sprung agilely into the carriage, while a brace of sturdy supporters came to either side of the vehicle, ready to work or to wait, just as circumstances should demand.

"I want you, both!" sternly stated the Sporting Detective. "Act sensibly now, or I'll put the darbies on and let all the world know what's gone wrong!"

Eloise Houghton alone tried to show fight; but, as her ready hand jerked forth a gleaming revolver, the detective caught her by the wrist and disarmed her, that same weapon staring the Track Adonis full in the face as a further grim warning against giving any trouble to these, the officers of an outraged law.

Before the middle watches were spent that night, all was made sufficiently clear to those more intimately concerned, and a few sentences will suffice to clear away such few points as may be in doubt.

Thanks to that "life-preserver" which Miles Honeyman recognized, he was not long in getting the thug cornered, and by promising him freedom from prosecution, pumped him dry.

The Sporting Detective planned all the rest. He sought out Jockey Jap, and threatened him with the penitentiary for a life-time unless he would consent to ride strictly in accordance with orders.

Knowing that this was his only show of escape, Deagle consented, and as examination of the saddle showed, tampered with the hidden battery, making it possible for him to

break off that copper hook in pulling it forth to administer the full charge, and by so doing, destroy the connection, after which the result might easily be left to Dandy Pat himself!

Then, when examination should be made by the allies, that broken hook would explain all, and so relieve the rider from even the suspicion of betraying the traitors, of playing "a double-cross!"

But, fate decided otherwise, and before the sun went out of sight that same evening, the human ape had told his evil tale and passed from this life to—what?

Clifford Carpenter recovered from his wounds, and now having gained a far sweeter and wiser inspiration for living, disposed of his racing stables, only retaining the gallant little winner of the Big Bonanza Stakes, together with a few trotters for the road and saddle.

He confidently assured Gerva Gale that he actually detested her surname, begging on his bended knees for her to substitute another; and before that year grew old, the cards were issued for a wedding.

Miles Honeyman was an honored guest, for now his hands were free, he having taken both Ulrich Farquhar and Eloise Houghton back East to answer for a murderous crime—the proof of which he had been for many long months trying to rivet upon them.

He held the Mayo Preston killing in reserve; but, in a confidential chat with the prospective bridegroom, he promised not to broach that, if the criminal pair could be convicted without this latest charge.

"Let that be my wedding gift to you, old man!" the Sporting Detective said, gravely; but adding, with his usual light laugh: "I reserve the right to make Miss Gerva happy, though, remember!"

The two bookmakers, Doc Brierley and John Singular, managed to compromise with their creditors, but at once sunk into total obscurity, from which it is doubtful if they ever again emerge.

The electrical saddle being exposed, will hardly be tried again, at least until the story of that curiously-involved "hog-killing" has passed from the memory of mankind.

Claudine Vaughn has buried the troubled past, and now sails under another name, although "The Oriole" still shows at the race-tracks in her brilliant plumage!

Old Hank Ingalls proved too tough to die of his injuries, and is the inmate of an asylum, mumbly day and night about "Jockey Jap's Double-Cross!"

THE END.

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